



**IARTEM *e-Journal*  
Volume 7 No 2**

**Volume 7 Number 2**

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**The anti-democratic employment of school cyberspace. A pilgrimage into an Arab winter?**

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**Abstract**

In this article I wish to bring critical attention to the manner in which the Internet and intranet are employed as pedagogical space in schools. Within this article I also articulate my struggle to understand and conduct research in this place of electronic communication. Informed by Nietzsche and some biblical scripture, I suggest that what we are finding in education is a church of the intranet that is worshiped as a shelter of safety for educational learning. However, my contention is that a lack of control of uploaded and downloaded digital media results in spaces which mirror extant societal prejudices and bigotry. To evidence my argument I present specific data from English schools' colonisation of cyberspace and suggest that in this terra nullius<sup>1</sup> a new civilisation, constructed upon old world ideals, 'conformed' the construction of the disabled indigene.

**Keywords:** the Internet, disability, cyberspace

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<sup>1</sup> Terra nullius the colonial doctrine of "empty land," that colonised land was empty (or indeed emptied) of human inhabitants and therefore could be legally claimed and settled by colonists. Electronic document,, <http://cw.routledge.com/textbooks/9780415485395/glossary.asp>.

## Introduction

*Governments of the Industrial World... I come from Cyberspace, the new home of Mind... I address you with no greater authority than that with which liberty itself always speaks. I declare the global social space we are building to be naturally independent of the tyrannies you seek to impose on us. You have no moral right to rule us nor do you possess any methods of enforcement we have true reason to fear... We are creating a world where anyone, anywhere may express his or her beliefs, no matter how singular, without fear of being coerced into silence or conformity... We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before.<sup>2</sup>*

During a visit to a local school, a teacher commented that they liked the school's internet and intranet as it provided a 'safe space' in which pupils could learn<sup>3</sup>. As a researcher, I too entered this space cloaked in a shroud of utopian ideal. This ideal centred on the belief that in this 'brave new world' disability, social justice and equality might harmoniously co-exist. Here though was my first error, and this ideal became but an epigraph to my naivety. Through immersing myself in the cultures and practices of the World Wide Web, an educational space was revealed that was but a mirror to the reflected images of society's bigotries and 'ableist' agendas (see Hodkinson 2012). In Cover's (1983: 65) words, then, this mirror then was 'not [a]... mask of reality' but reflected only the 'reality of past ages'. Exploration of this topos, in Cover's terms, did not reflect a separation between life and knowledge, but more as Latour (2010) states it produced no homological inversions only inversions of inversions. My utopian ideal inverted, my journey became constrained and conformed by a Cartesian logic. It was this logic which brought me crashing back to this earth and its old world geographies.

This article, then, details my examination of the topography of internet and intranet spaces and of my struggle to form an understanding of the society that has been constructed in this electronic landscape. Within the paper I move away from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of specific goods<sup>4</sup> to emplace a new theoretic with which to map out this space of internet. My central argument, my guiding light for this journey of enlightenment, is that schools' cyberspace, as a

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<sup>2</sup>A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace – Davos- Switzerland 1996 – John Perry Barlow <https://projects.eff.org/~barlow/Declaration-Final.html>

<sup>3</sup> Putting to one side the moral panic which renders the information super highway as a topos inhabited by predatory pedophiles, one awash with pornography, every fetish known to society, and that safe space is an overused but under-theorised metaphor (Hodkinson, in press).

<sup>4</sup> For a deeper analysis of the analysis of internet goods in this educational space see Hodkinson (2012c).

space of pedagogy, had become Latour's black box (Latour, 1987) where the perceived shelters of equality were so simple, so deeply rooted as to remain unquestioned (Bachelard, 1994). By employing biblical scripture counterpointed by the writings of Nietzsche, I contend that these shelters of equality were built with 'walls of impalpable shadows,'<sup>5</sup> stabilised on a bedrock of educational rhetoric. As such these shelters, as Bachelard (1994: 5) accounts, provided nothing but 'illusions of protection' for equality, social justice and inclusive educational practice).

### **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God<sup>6</sup>**

*...From these connections we will derive robust and sustainable economic progress, strong democracy, better solutions to global and local environmental challenges, improved health care and ultimately a greater sense of shared stewardship of our small planet ...*

*...In a sense, the Global Information Infrastructure will be a metaphor for democracy itself. (Al Gore, Vice-President, U.S.A., 1995: 5)*

According to Thornton (2002), every emergent communicative medium has been revered, and the fervour of its disciples have brought forth homiletics grounded in the belief that this technology, unlike the unrealised hopes of the ones before, will materialise positive social change on a 'scale not seen for hundreds and thousands of years before' (37). For example, in the early twentieth century radio instilled in people a hope that it would produce a utopian democracy (Spinelli, 2000). Within this 'glamorous fog' the German psychologist and social theorist, Arnheim, in 1936 claimed that the:

*democratising power of the radio [was] so complete that it makes class distinctions irrelevant and the concept of class as anachronistic. (Spinelli, 2000: 270)*

The intellectuals and journalists of the 1950s continued this deification, worshipping radio as the greatest educational medium of the modern age (Rheingold, 2000), one which Spinelli (2000: 26) suggests would bring forth 'universal and equal educational opportunities for all'. Like radio before, television

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5 I shall investigate this space of impalpable shadows later in the paper.

6 John 1:1 – New American Standard Bible

of the 1950s and 1960s' homiletic was that it was the 'silver bullet,' the magical technological fix, for all of society's democratic and social problems. As Surman details, television was a medium that would 'improve education, prevent crime, prevent urban decay, break down societal isolation, help people to communicate and enhance social democracy' (see Thornton, 2002: 5). Here then is the Internet's Bible – Genesis, Chapter One, Verse One – the rehearsed script, which paints in the present a motif of Al Gore as the high priest of the democratising influence of the Church of the Internet. Within this idolatry and enforced teleology it seems that, as Nietzsche (1895: 27) states, 'submission to the priest alone redeems'.

However, whilst it may be argued that radio was employed in Algeria in the middle of the twentieth century as a catalyst for democratic and social change (see Pickard, 2008) in general the techno fix of these media was not realised<sup>7</sup>. Naughton (2003: 163) points out 'the history of descriptive technologies is often one of... struggle between technical innovation and societal control'. Indeed, Rheingold (2000) highlights that every emergent communicative technology brings a 'shadow potential' as democracy becomes suppressed 'by power plays... as compelling forces fight for influence and control over communication flow' (319). Such power plays ensure that the rehearsed script of democracy, delivered by 'parasitical priests' (Nietzsche, 1895), becomes rhetoric. As Spinelli (2000: 265) accounts, the promise of utopian miracles 'obfuscates any real understanding of the... emergent medium in society and ultimately nullifies its potential for social change'. This then is idolatry, where, as Ainsworth et al. (2005: 124) suggest, 'the Internet, like the telescreen that George Orwell envisioned... is seen to pose a threat to democracy, through the ways in which government... uses it to manipulate users'

*... Your 'prophets' have said so many foolish things, false to the core.  
... Instead, they painted false pictures, filling you with false hope.  
(Lamentations 2:11-14)*

Juxtaposition of Nietzsche's writings here renders this rehearsed script as homiletic and 'one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on [this earth]' (Nietzsche, 1885: 18). It represents the low-water mark in this divine thing's development – this God then is contradiction – 'it is a deity of nothingness – the will to nothingness pronounced holy!' (Nietzsche, 1885: 18). In this new hyper world, topography is dominated by a creationist techno prophecy, which,

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<sup>7</sup> For an incisive account of the (mis)employment of television in this respect in Samoa see Edwards, A. (2012) *New Technology and Education*. London: Continuum.

acting as antonym to the old world 'end of days' prophecy, has likewise not been realised. Like the apocalyptic zealots, each day (read here technology) brings forth nothing but disappointment. Thus, the solution to the lack of realisation of the prophecy is for the priests to pray harder, realign dates, adjust slightly their homiletic and pray that the next 'big thing' brings redemption and perhaps even salvation. The end of the old world is nigh, a new digital world of third wave democracy will arrive, but perhaps in a tomorrow that never comes; as Stronach et al. (2012: 3). suggest, 'Like much in the postmodern, it is only what it will have been'

Let us begin a pilgrimage into this hyper world and its 'places of shadows'.

## **The Internet**

Recent Internet statistics reveal 2,267,233,742<sup>8</sup> users worldwide. Margetts (2009: 31) details that for many of us 'large chunks of our time' are spent gazing at the 'depthless surface' of the computer monitor as window to our exploration of the topology of cyberspace (Borgman, 2010). This 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1989) and new 'celebrated social space' (Chon, n.d.: 149) has, Borman (2010) states, invaded and transformed western cultural space in its entirety, creating new geopolitical boundaries. Cyberspace is, in Platonic terms, an everlasting space of emplacement, a created techno-utopian ideal (Margetts, 2009) where a seemingly 'gilt-edged revolution of informatilisation' (Yanarella et. al., 2000: 48) obfuscated by a 'glamorous fog' (Borgman, 2010) is disturbing and encroaching on traditional modalities of information exchange located in our schools (Hodkinson, 2012a).

Naughton (2003) details that the Internet itself evolved in, a 'quiet metamorphosis' (Pickard, 2008: 427) of a military communication project funded by the United States Department of Defence. Although the Internet is perceived as a computer network, Naughton (2003) notes that no single monolithic structure prevails. Rather, a matrix of 'eco systems of sub-cultures' (Rheingold, 2000: xviii) enmesh to form global computer-to-computer networks operating using such languages as the transmission control protocol (TCP/IP). Born out of the belly of Cold War nuclear threat (Yanarella et. al., 2000), Rheingold (2000: xvi) details that this earliest 'virtual village', of a few hundred people, has transmuted itself to a state, where, within western society, it dominates many spheres of daily life. Cyberspace, then, with its 'highways of the mind' (Al Gore 1991 in Rheingold, 2000: xvii), is credited with the potentiality to revolutionise participatory

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

democracy and contribute to various sociological phenomenon, not least education, that in due course will positively transmogrify the public sphere (Thornton2002).

### ***Cyber optimists versus cyber pessimists***

Naughton, (2003: 491) states there can be no doubt that the Internet and its technologies represents a 'radical transformation of the communication environment', both at societal level generally and specifically within educational environments. For 'cyber optimists' (like Gore above and Barlow earlier) and many western policymakers, the Internet has taken on a mythical power which is bound up in a quasi-religious belief of positivity. Within cyberspace, Morozov, (2011: 10) suggests that many people believe that almost 'supernatural things' are possible as the Internet becomes the panacea, the techno-fix, for all societal ills (Rheingold, 2000). Furthermore, the 'holy people' worshipping at the feet of this deity 'with awe inspiring' consistency (Nietzsche, 1895: 27) vehemently believe that in this digital age 'new democratic forms' (Pickard, 2008: 621) will be unleashed which will act as 'force multipliers' for democratic movements (see Morozov, 2011: 39). Evidentially, such movements are to be observed all around us. For example, claims are made that 'The Internet and social networks have been conclusively established as tools for protest, campaigning and circulating information, and as vehicles for freedom' (Reporters Without Borders, 2012) in the wake of their perceived role in movements such as the Arab Spring. For others, as Pickard (2008: 625) states, an 'impressive body of scholarship' details how this digital age has reinvigorated civil society by enabling 'previously marginalised voices to engage' (Nunes, 1995: 625).

Within this public sphere, Rheingold, (2000: 279) asserts that cyberspace is producing a 'utopian electronic agora,' an 'Athens without slaves', and that this new 'Athenian age of democracy' (Gore, 1995: 4) is upon us and within us. Here, then, the digital topography has built at its nucleus a church of the Internet where pilgrims and missionary zealots flock to offer praise within its networked aisles. If they are correct, we should believe that within this church Thomas Jefferson's<sup>9</sup> aims are finally to be realised. Here within this ecclesia lies a Holy Trinity, as a new tripartite soul<sup>10</sup> of personal liberty, diversity, and community becomes the

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<sup>9</sup> In the thick of party conflict in 1800, Thomas Jefferson wrote in a private letter, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/presidents/thomasjefferson>

<sup>10</sup> This is a willful corruption of the notion of the Platonic tripartite soul as appetitive, rational and spirited.

altar of worship to a new society based upon a 'commitment to pluralism' (Nunes, 1995: 3).

*I found also an altar on which was inscribed, To the unknown God.  
Whom therefore ye reverence, not knowing him, him I announce to  
you. (Acts 17:23)*

Hallelujah brothers and sisters, we are all to be saved!

However, if cyberspace is metaphor for democracy and agent provocateur of radical change, why then an Arab spring in Lybia and not, say, in Syria, Tibet or Bahrain? In reality many of these countries are experiencing the chill of an Arab winter not the blossoming rays of its springtime. To work allegorically with the words of Nietzsche, is the God of the Internet dead, will he/she/its democratising religion remain dead? And who is culpable in this deicide? Pilgrims, we must be careful with this 'hyper reality'<sup>11</sup> because from the creation of the Internet, but, more so since its rapid globalisation, researchers have questioned the effect of this electronic topology upon political institutions and their machinations. Indeed, as Best & Wade (2006) state, practitioners and researchers alike have pondered whether the Internet is truly a force for good in the development of a system of democratic ideals. At this point, then, I propose we step back from the 'rhetoric of internet triumphalism' and the worship of such graven idols (Pickard, 2008: 629). I want to ask this God some searching questions. Not least, whether the 'enlightenment ideals of this world liberated from itself' (Nunes, 1995: 314) stack up to cold, dispassionate scrutiny.

Rather than pilgrim, perhaps here I am becoming a sceptic looking for redemption. The pilgrimage for now though re-commences. Let us interrogate this new god of democracy, this 'teledemocracy' (Reid, 2000: 717).

### ***Bringing forth heresy: Defining/undermining/refining the tripartite soul***

*... But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will  
be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive  
heresies, even denying the Master who bought them. (Peter 2:1-22)*

I want, firstly, to challenge the central doctrine that participation positively correlates with increased democracy. Second, I wish to explore the question of

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<sup>11</sup> 'For Baudrillard... "that which was lived as a metaphor in the terrestrial habitat is from now on projected entirely without metaphor, into the absolute space of simulation" (Ecstasy 16). No longer a metaphor for change, the simulated highway of Internet becomes a form of virtual reality.' See Nunes (1995:314).

participation. Participation in what and by whom? It seems to me that the latter question is where sceptics and pilgrims alike should devote their energies of analysis if we are ever truly to understand this 'most open, uncensored and unregulated public space in history' (Naughton, 2003: 167).

### **Heresy one: 'The destruction of the gospel of participation'**

One of the major claims for the 'seductiveness' (Chon, n.d.) of the Internet is that fluidity of organisation and anarchic architecture (Reid, 2000) promote more 'egalitarian' than elitist and more 'decentred than hierarchical spaces' (Nunes, 1995: 316). The significance of 'internetting technology', Naughton (2003: 147) believes, is that the permissive architecture of the global network enables anyone anywhere to connect and take part. As Naughton (2003: 146) states, this doctrine promotes a libertarian ethos and 'permissive architecture' that enables groups and organisations outside of conventional power structures to be empowered. Furthermore, it is in the anonymity of access that Chon (n.d: 147) believes apparent attributes such as 'sex or race [and I would add disability] are masked or even non-existent'. It is this, Naughton (2003:146) argues, that enables 'free expression and dissemination of view'.

Truly, pilgrims, it does appear that within this space 'Nobody knows you are a dog!'<sup>12</sup>.

This homiletic is plain, clear and simple – the Internet facilitates egalitarian, cooperative and communicative exchange (Reid, 2000), which breaks down traditional prejudices, social boundaries and inequalities (Margetts, 2009). If we accept this, the church's gospel – its 'good news message' – becomes 'Build it and they will come'. Here, then, is the first miracle of the Internet church: 'if access can be granted participation will follow' (Ainsworth et al., 2005: 124). Baptised and washed over by the info-flow, proselytes – especially those marginalised in the current system (Ainsworth, et al. 2005) – are emancipated and empowered. This gospel of utilitarianism is clear: the bigger you build your church, the more people will participate and thus democracy is ensured.

This gospel message therefore seeks to break through the 'digital divide'<sup>13</sup>. Major funding bodies<sup>14</sup> in England and elsewhere have supported research generally,

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<sup>12</sup> Caption from a cartoon by Peter Steiner July 5, 1993 issue of *The New Yorker*. The cartoon is representational of supposed anonymity of the Internet. Lawrence Lessig details that "no one knows" because Internet protocols do not force identification of the user. See, Lawrence.L. (2006:35). Code: Version 2.0. Basic Books.

<sup>13</sup> The digital divide is a term employed to articulate the disparity between poor and wealthy households, between some third world countries and first world countries, and between some people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in their abilities to be able to access internetting technology

<sup>14</sup>For example, the Economic Social and Research Council (ESRC).

and specifically in education, which investigates how all people might be enabled to access interneting technology. We must, though, question this gospel and undermine its 'good news' message. This Internet has a much darker side. Rather than creating a new democratic world, I will demonstrate later that the Internet, and its digital media, is colonising electronic space with old world bigoted traditions, values and ideologies:

*. . . The deity of decadence, gelded in his most virile virtues and instincts, becomes of necessity the god of the physiologically retrograde, of the weak. Of course, they do not call themselves the weak; they call themselves 'the good'. (Nietzsche, 1895:17 )*

This deity of Internet, however, pontificates over a doctrine of utilitarian participation shrouded with caveats. For example, it is claimed the Internet makes possible the enhancement of 'community social relations' (Yanarella, 2000: 67). Thus, Pickard (2000: 662) states, the 'potential for emancipatory technology [is] indeed possible'. Here is the first heresy, the doctrine of participation is based upon but possibilities and potential. Here again is error. As Morozov (2011: 21) accounts, it is 'a mistake to treat the internet as a deterministic and one-directional force for ... global liberation'. To Rheingold (1993: 279), the error of this participatory doctrine is that it is a potential only possibly achieved. Potential here though is formed not upon passive participation, but malformed as an active defence of the cause. This notion of 'defenders of the faith' reveals metaphors of power and resistance which illuminate imagery of crusading technologists. These metaphors of power/resistance, defence/crusade invert Habermas' theoretic that the public sphere must be reclaimed if it is to be a 'source of reasoned consensus formulation' (see Thornton, 2002: 231). Reclaimed by whom, for whom? Bring forth the Knights Templar – the warrior technologists – to create/claim/reclaim and reform the topos in a sanctified, beatified war of occupation. However, despite the occupational forces and in spite of priests proselytising, what we face now is 'videomalaise'. Within such, an inversion exists between people who interact with digital media and their trust in politicians (Habermas, 2006: 427). Habermas' (2006) research therefore invokes the deicide of this Internet god. This is because he asserts that despite inclusion of ever more citizens, Internet users are ambivalent or downright pessimistic about the impact of this medium of communication on democracy.

### **Heresy Two: 'Control of the info flow'**

Habermas (2006: 419) relates that 'mass communication is yet another source of power where players on the virtual stage take control by employment of the capital they possess'. Here, we may observe Foucault's analytics of modern power and that one never really stands outside power dynamics (See Hodkinson,

2012c). In this Internet church therefore we may observe that individualisation, equality and social justice are forced to compete/participate within totalising structures of modern power (Agamben, 1998: 5). Here, in Agamben's (1998: 17) terms, there is to be no state of exception, no exemption from this power. There is to be only the mirrored gaze of a past society. A reflected image of totalising power that corrupts totally<sup>15</sup>. Information within the Internet, Morozov (2011: 23) details, as with all previous technologies, 'does not flow in a vacuum but in a political space that is already occupied' In this participation/obligation/coercion game, Ainsworth et al. (2005: 127/129) believe a 'constellation of power relations' shrouds who decides 'what the game is, and what it is about and also who decides who gets in the game'. Participation in this topos then is double-edged. You are forced to participate in a game of unequal teams.

*... The greatest recent event – that God is dead – is that the belief in  
... God has become unbelievable. (Nietzsche, 1887: section 343)*

Cyberspace, then, Yanarella (2000:59) states, is a contested terrain dominated by unequal power distributions. Naughton (2003: 166) believes that while the doctrine of liberty might have developed a 'new tool kit, cultural economic, societal and political factors determines who gets to use it'. The myth that participation correlates to democracy is just that, a myth. Ainsworth et al. (2005) suggest that this internetting technology might actually increase the divide between the powerful and the powerless. This digital landscape then demonstrates how the Internet becomes just a new iteration of established practices (Morozov, 2011). For Nietzsche (1885), this Internet world and its democratic credentials would seem intangible. Its participation gospel is imagined science – it is anthropocentric, governed by imagined psychology. This world is pure fiction – it falsifies, devalues and negates its own techno reality. Once this gospel pronounced a correlation between the Internet, participation and democracy – there was no opposite of this God – natural tendencies, values and ideology became synonyms of 'reprehensible' (Nietzsche, 1885). This world of democratic fiction was to be grounded on the hatred of the nature of reality. It became the expression of a profound vexation of the sight of reality (Nietzsche, 1885).

*... if you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty of sin: but now that you  
claim you can see your guilt remains. (John 9:41)*

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<sup>15</sup> Here then I argue that Agamben state of exception is suspended by this state in order to create a utopian upside/ down, right way up state where the mirror reflects a separation between ontology and narrative (Professor Ian Stronach – personal correspondence 1/10/12)

### **Heresy Three: ‘Mirrored images – reflected bigotry’**

*Mirrors...*

*I see them as infinite, elemental*

*Executors of an ancient pact*

*To multiply the world like the act...*

*They prolong this hollow, unstable world...*

*Of every day may include the illusionary*

*Profound globe that reflections scheme.*

(Dreamtigers – Borges, J.L. )

The argument I develop here is that the internet is but a mirror of a past society, a mirror which, as Cover (1983: 289) states, 'imposes the discipline of institutional justice upon norms and place'. In this 'glassy essence' the metaphysics of transparency form a unifying dialectic between internet present and society's past reality, between this god's mind and nature; between subject and object. This mirror inverts the inversion. It reflects into this space only a separation between ontology and narrative. Bigoted stereotypical images and ideals in the extant world are reflected and transposed onto this electronic topography. In this world, then, there is no unbridgeable gulf between reflection and that which is reflected. There is no irreducible opposition here. Participation in this world is equivalent to obligation/coercion/equality. In the creation of this space of shadows a double bind of 'fiery illusion' and 'icy reason' (Latour, 2010) were folded in on themselves. Explicit became implicit contradiction (Latour, 2010) as inequalities of past society acted as a hinge for this new world. As such, this 'safe space' became an educational playground where coercion/participation morphed to produce a state of being that effectively acted as a method of societal control – this space becomes jurispathic (Cover 1983). In this place the subject believes they are free but, as Latour (2010) proclaims, in reality they are wholly controlled. The mirror becomes a transparent reflection of the cold computer screen – it is the antithetical inverting focus onto a topography of bigoted stereotypical inversions where, as Cover (1983: 289) details, conditions of knowledge are 'independent of what empirically exists'.

Let's though try to be positive; the Internet is determined by the ingenuity of its users (Naughton, 2003) and its open transfer protocols do promote rapid communication on a global scale. Indeed, this new space is also one where traditional publishing 'road blocks' such as cost (Margetts, 2002), and short text shelf life (Naughton, 2003) can be overcome by employing internetting technology. Thus, the potentiality is there to enable the voices of marginalised populations to be heard. However, this potentiality only further illuminates the perverted reflections of this mirror. It is in the pedagogy of the voice (Reid, 2000)

where a colonising demand and its control of narrative materialises within this digital space<sup>16</sup>. Whilst the high priests of the Internet enunciate in democratising voices and promote a space to hear voices of democracy, their gospel 'completely ignores the social conditions of vast groups of people' (Chon, n.d.). For many, the reality of this space of info flows is one which increasingly reflects the hegemony of the space of places (Yanarella, 2000). For Margetts the Internet is not a new democratic arena but a place where 'social problems reinvent themselves... in a new space of inequality' (2009:6). For example, Thornton (2002:17) details that men 'have been a dominant presence on the Internet' and that the Internet from its conception was male territory. Reid (2000) concurs, adding that the prevailing hierarchy of this Internet community also places race, class and age as subaltern to societal conceptions of normalcy. According to Lessig's framework (see Best & Wade, 2006:13), social norms regulate the Internet space through community transferred stigma. Hall (1999:45), in an extraordinarily astute and early analysis of the Internet, describes such technology as an 'irrepresentational machine' where monolingualism and homogeneity dominate. He comments,

*... Rather than transcending barriers, then, the Internet culture seems to reinforce them, accentuating the themes of modernism rather than replacing them and reducing heterogeneity... the Internet seems to be promoting lifestyle enclaves ... seen in this light [this] ... media age begins much more like earlier civilisations. (Hall, 1999: 46)*

I wish now to add to Lessig's framework and so analyse how the construct of disability is (mal)formed within this digital topography. My analysis here centres on the belief that the breaking down of traditional barriers to publishing has led to the strong voice of disabled people being inverted to that of a cultural whisper. I wish also to detail how my naïve wanderings in this digital world were shrouded in the priests' Internet teachings and how my imaginings of this world were in Nietzsche's terms 'pure fiction'. For it is in this world, of supposed democracy, that constructions of disability and disabled people were 'vastly inferior' to those in my extant world (Nietzsche, 1895: 25). My ideals of Internet as a space of possibilities for social justice and equality were not to be realised. The findings of my research demonstrate that the price of this new space of digital existence was the destruction of nature and one where the power (the Internet god) had distinguished a real past world as unholy and as one full of sin (Nietzsche, 1895).

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16 See Author (2012a).

### ***Wanderings in a mirrored space***

Reflection as etymological embryo designates the mirror's action as that of a reproducing object. In re-entering this electronic space then I wish now to bend back this mirror's reflected gaze. Let the mirror therefore mirror itself – let it see itself (Gasche, 1986). In providing specific data from my research into this place of 'impalpable shadows' (Gasche, 1986) I want to reveal this space as one where the concept of being truly appears to itself.

Within my research<sup>17</sup> I examined, through the employment of proto-text analysis, the representation of disability, impairment and disabled people within the electronic media employed within primary schools in England. Although the sample of schools was in itself limited, I was able to collect a wealth of data that represented the electronic materials used in very many schools in England.

The initial analysis was based upon the framework developed by Hodkinson (2007) which was informed by the work of Dyches et. al. (2001). This meant that each electronic resource was examined page by page, with any pictures, illustrations or texts which related to disability or disabled people being demarcated by the researcher. The illustration and textual examples were then allocated to the specific categories of disability by the researcher. This initial categorisation of the data was shared with a colleague and the categories refined. This revision observed the erasure of the category of disability for characters wearing eye glasses who did not display another indicator of impairment. This was because whilst a minor visual impairment might be assumed by the wearing of glasses, a disability might not. In total, 12 overarching categories were employed that covered a wide range of physical and learning disabilities.

The second phase of the research examined the demarcated sections of text using linguistic analysis (Crawford, 2004). Here, linguistic forms within the text such as the lexicon, agency and action, voice, verbs and adjectives (Ninnes, 2002) were analysed to reveal any 'hidden assumptions' about disability and disabled people (Crawford, 2004, p. 21). During this phase, a frequency analysis was also conducted; simple counting of the discrete sections examined how frequently disability, disabled people or impairments were mentioned. Finally, an examination of the images within the scheme books was undertaken. This involved a simple tallying of the people, categorised by race, disability, impairment and gender (Johnsen, 1993).

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<sup>17</sup> For a full account of this research and its methodology see (Hodkinson, 2012c)

In total, I analysed 494 separate electronic resources which included 4,485 illustrations, 930 photographs, 59 video clips and hundreds of pages of text. The electronic media contained textbooks, smartboard resources, computer games, teacher constructed and commercial worksheets, websites, teacher initiated photographs and video clips. Despite the depth of the data collected, a significant finding was a lack of material relating to disability and impairment.

In summary, this research explored and explained, and in phenomenological terms gained a first-hand description of, the image of disability uncovered in the electronic resources. From the outset, this explorative research did not aim to impose, find truths or indeed to attempt to prove something right or wrong. An attempt was made merely to interpret this reality and to help to understand this human experience.

### ***Revelations – Chapter one: The mirror's inverting/perverting image***

My pilgrimage into this digital educational world was marked by the virtual absence of an image of disability<sup>18</sup>. Indeed my wanderings in this mirrored topography highlighted a pedagogical space where the most prevalent image encountered was that of the white, non-disabled adult male. Here the mirror's reflected light materialised an agenda of ableism and normalcy. I also found the mirror's 'glassy essence' in texts discovered within the school's intranet sites. I wish here, in this article, to focus upon just one such text. This electronic storybook is worthy of analysis. This is because it illuminates disability as a metaphor of a societal inversion of the image of the pirate.

The pirate employed in this story represented the 'baddy' in the narrative, an all too familiar construct in western children's literature. The pirate here was a diminutive figure, rather overweight, and with his ruddy cheeks appeared not to be in the best of health. Indeed, a heart attack seemed imminent. He had a lower limb amputation, a prosthetic limb, a visual impairment necessitating an eye patch and a 'scruffy black beard'. He was described as follows:

*... Of course like most pirates [he] had a wooden peg for a leg so every now and then he would wobble and hobble as he walked...*

*... All in all [he] didn't seem like a very fearsome pirate at all.*

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<sup>18</sup> The full results and a more general analysis of the images of disability found in the electronic resources are available in Hodkinson (2012c).

Here, then, disability was constructed through a person supposed to be 'sinister and evil'. However, this pirate could not even get this characterisation right. Instead, he was located within the text more as a 'pitiable and pathetic' person, an 'object of ridicule'. This representation of disability reflects Biklen & Bogdana's (1977) analysis of the general media's categorisation of disability. To move the disability/pirate metaphor further (although not along a plank – as we shall observe later this is misrepresentation of pirate culture), another of Biklen and Bogdana's categorisations is aptly represented in Stevenson's classic portrayal of the pirate in *Treasure Island*. Here, Stevenson portrays Long John Silver as being courageous despite his impairments. It seems the image of the 'supercrip' was never very far away.

Interestingly though, like disability, pirates too have had their reality inverted through the process of a 'bad press' (Kuhn, 2010). Note for example this early piece of misrepresentation. Alexander Exquemelin, 'being possessed of a devil's fury, ripped open one of the prisoners with his cutlass, tore the living heart out of his body, gnawed at it, and then hurled it in the face of one of the others' (in *The Buccaneers of America* (1678), see Kuhn, 2010). Upon reading this quote one feels you should shout, in a West Country accent, 'shiver me timbers' and 'ah Jim Lad' but this would be false as this is the reflected language of disneyfication not of piratology<sup>19</sup>. Disability during this period was no more common amongst pirates than the general population and, interestingly, it was pirates who set up some of the first charities for disabilities (Kuhn, 2010). This picture then would seem to stand at some distance from the image of pirates reflected into the present day.

In this electronic space the history of western culture and its relationship with impairment was revealed. It should be noted here that throughout history impairments, such as a hunched back, a hook, a wooden leg and an eye-patch have always been employed as a metaphor for evil and depravity in narratives into which children are inculcated (Connor and Bejoian, 2007). In contrast, 'goodness' is reflected throughout society by angel-like figures of long, flowing, (invariably blonde) locks and smiling faces. Connor and Bejoian (2007) believe that such dichotomous images are nothing more than a form of disabilism which lead to the 'abnormalisation' of the cultural image of disabled people (Hodkinson, 2011).

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<sup>19</sup> Yes there is such a word!

Here, then, the pilgrimage illuminates disability as a limited, controlled and conformed indigene. The limited construct of disability observed here pulls focus on the cultural dominance of non-disabled people within this society.

*... The mirror's self-reflection is the embracing whole that allows itself into Other, which explains why it faces an object in the first place and why it returns reflexively to itself. (Gasche, 1986,21)*

## **Conclusions – Shattering the mirror**

In this ecclesia, then, 'neither morality nor religion had a single point of contact with reality' (Nietzsche, 1895). Knowledge had split into two forms. Here the mirror's reflecting image illuminated empirical knowledge, void of concepts, which revealed an understanding of 'a priori conditions of knowledge, independent of what empirically [existed]' (Gasche, 1986: 26). This knowledge though had only imaginary cause, but it had very real effects in defining societal conceptions of impairment. It was intercourse between 'imaginary beings and imaginary natural science'... and with the aid of the sign of 'religio-moral idiosyncrasy, repentance ... and the presence of this God,' it became imagined teleology, revealing only 'nervus sympathicus' (Nietzsche, 1895: 15). The heresies and research findings detailed above demonstrate that technology alone does not bring forth democracy. Rather democracy, concepts of social justice, equality and inclusion are allowed to be born, to die and to be reborn by a general synod of the 'significant' in society, which for time immemorial has always controlled and constrained the info flow. My argument though is that we should not, in Agamben's (1998) terms, flee from this god of 'potentiality of the possible' but rather we should adapt our heresies (our malevolent power in Spinozan analysis) as a weapon to reveal oppression. This new world, in Nietzsche's (1895:26) terms, requires 'a sanctification after the event'. There is a need to bring forth a conferring power to instil values – one which negates what has become natural in this new digital topography. By doing this we must create a new set of values and morality and preach disobedience to the Internet god. That is, to its priests, to the law bound up in its Internet bible and its good news gospel messages. To paraphrase the words of the musician Johnny Cash, although hard we must 'kick against the priests'. We must create sin! For it is only from this departure point that there can be reconciliation with this god. Indeed, revelation and redemption of the nature of a past world is dependent upon such. The weaknesses inherent from birth in this new god should be reformed to create a god of love, of inclusiveness in the emplacement in this digital topos. This would disempower the lexicon of possibilities and potentiality. Salvation is within our grasp, but if we

want this world to become more humane and fair, as Barlow prophesied earlier, we need to reach out and take it one keystroke at a time.

*... All the concepts of the church have been recognised for what they are, the most malignant counterfeits that exist, the aim of which is to devalue nature and natural values; the priest himself has been recognised for what he is, the most dangerous kind of parasite, the real poison-spider of life. We know, today our conscience knows, what these uncanny inventions of the priests and the church are really worth, what ends they served in reducing mankind to such a state of self-violation that its sight can arouse nausea ... (Nietzsche, 1895:38)*

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