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Digimodernism and Web 2.0

Polyphonic plenitude, the searching out and affirmation of the plurality of different voices, became the leading and defining principle of postmodernism's cultural politics. Just as Goethe is said to have died with the Enlightenment slogan "Mehr Licht!" ("More Light!") on his lips, so at one point one might have imagined postmodernism going ungenderly into its goodnight uttering the defiant cry, "More Voices!"

Steven Connor, 2004¹

In an important sense, of course, Web 2.0 doesn't exist. (The term belongs in the antilexicon.) Much of the technology underpinning it has been in place since the Web's inception, and some of its most emblematic examples are almost as old; Tim Berners-Lee is surely right to argue that its common meaning "was what the Web was supposed to be all along."² Well known since a conference in 2004, and despite suffering from hype—*The Economist*, mindful of the dotcom mania, has referred sardonically to "Bubble 2.0"³—the accepted sense of the term is nevertheless a convenient textual category: it denotes the written and visual productivity and the collaboration of Internet users in a context of reciprocity and interaction, encompassing, for instance, "wikis, blogs, social-networking, open-source, open-content, file-sharing [and] peer-production."⁴ Moving beyond read-only information-source Web sites, the textuality of Web 2.0 sites notably favors (in the jargon) "user participation" and "dynamic content." Moreover, "Web 2.0 also includes a social element where users generate and distribute content, often with freedom to share and re-use."⁵ The forms of Web 2.0 are the most globally important cultural development of the twenty-first century so far, and they lie at the heart of digimodernism as we currently know it.

Although all Internet use is to some extent digimodernist, the latter is not reducible to the former, but stretches right across contemporary culture. Digimodernism doubtless comprises primary and secondary elements, causative and symptomatic factors, and central and peripheral areas, and Web 2.0 belongs to the first of each of these binaries (hence its getting a whole chapter to itself). This is largely a sociological point, and a reflection on its relationships with the older cultural forms explored later; it shouldn't be taken necessarily as some intellectual or aesthetic supremacy.

This chapter faces its own challenges. If the platforms it analyzes are the subjects of a continual torrent of commentary already from newspapers and magazines, it's partly because their perpetual evolution maps on to those outlets' immediacy. The time lags between a book being written and published and read would seem to condemn anything I can say here to almost immediate obsolescence. It's true that books about the Internet appear constantly, but almost all fall into one of two categories. First, there are the user guides that, written mostly in the mode of advice and the second person, offer instruction in how to set up and maintain your blog, how to get the most from YouTube or to develop your avatar on Second Life. Such a discourse is predicated on the sense that Web 2.0 is something *you use*; not a text that somebody else writes or films or you read or watch, but a machinery that you, and only you, control and direct; and not a signifying content concerning something else, like a narrative, but a physical act that you yourself do and is consumed in its own duration. Second, and more interestingly, there are the books predicated on the notion that Web 2.0 is something you exploit. Separated from its pejorative human context, the concept of exploitation is almost identical with that of usage: what's emphasized here is the assumption that Web 2.0 is *to be made use of*, an opportunity to explore, a possibility to benefit from. If by using Web 2.0 you open a door in your life to something new, then by *exploiting* it you take advantage of what you find on the other side of the portal. Consequently, exploitation books are just more sophisticated versions of usage ones; assuming knowledge of the latter, the former move beyond them. They isolate and examine the scope for objective personal advance contained in Web 2.0, and so focus on how it works not so much to do even more of it, but to profit from riding its social wave: usage books restrict themselves to subjective human advance, such as new personal pleasure. In this common pragmatic spirit, exploitation books are often oriented toward business practice: how to make money from Web 2.0; how to consume through it; how Web 2.0 is going to reshape the business landscape; how to survive it and thrive. For the tone of private advice, they substitute the language of management consultancy.

Two examples of this genre are David Jennings's *Net, Blogs and Rock n' Roll* (2007) and Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams' *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (2006, 2008). Jennings explores the nature of Web 2.0 and suggests how it may evolve. When he evokes the rise to prominence of Sandi Thom's music and the movie *Snakes on a Plane* through Internet-viral marketing, he is interested in how a product appeared on the market and was received or appropriated by its consumers; he isn't concerned with how good those texts are, or what they might mean; he has no conception of them as texts, only as objects of publicity and consumption.⁵ Tapscott and Williams advance the view that the particular organization of Wikipedia is the way that companies in future would be best advised to operate: this is Web 2.0 as the model of microeconomic success. They assume that Wikipedia is a success because it is used (read and written) by so many people: it's a consumerist system of values, whereby the widely bought product is automatically to be emulated. By a sleight of hand they then see this commodity as the prototype also of the future manufacturer of commodities.

I don't want to reject these kinds of writing entirely, though I suspect that the latter claim too much too quickly and won't stand the test of time; they are overly marked by the spirit of advertising integral to business. It's telling indeed that Web 2.0 lends itself immediately and most naturally to a discourse of practical and physical use. But, while highlighting this point, I can't see that these are the only ways you can talk about Web 2.0. It can also be read textually. Many of these platforms have a hard-copy precursor: the diary (blogs), the newspaper letters page (message boards), the script for a play (chat rooms),⁶ the encyclopedia (Wikipedia). At a second degree, YouTube resembles a festival of short films or documentaries. Social networking sites, slightly more problematically, adapt an earlier electronic platform, the personal Web page, rather than a pre-Web form of text, but this is not finally prohibitive of textual analysis. And if Web 2.0 can, on the whole, be assimilated to forms universally considered texts, then they are texts themselves (of a sort) and can be studied—as I'm going to here, in a way—textually.

This poses, again, its own difficulty. What can textual analysis tell us that is not already obvious to all? It isn't just these platforms' fame; it's their accessibility; above all, it's their ease of use, once more, by which so many people have gotten to know them intimately, from the inside out. The critic is a professional reader: Web 2.0 throws up the writer/reader, a new kind of textual knowledge and familiarity. A bigger problem still derives from the necessary incompleteness of the Web 2.0 text. The cultural critic typically watches entire films, gazes at completed paintings, reads finished

books, and consequently treats them in their totality. Web 2.0 texts, however, never come to a conclusion. They may stop, or be deleted, or fall out of favor (and off search engine results pages into oblivion), but they are not rounded off, not shaped into a sense either of organic coherence or of deliberate open-endedness. Items within them, like blog entries, may have this internal structure, but they fit into an overarching onwardness. Textual analysis of Web 2.0 must therefore *follow the text in time*: it must go with it as it develops, seemingly endlessly, over a lapse of weeks, months, or years. This distinguishes such analysis from that of any pre- or extra-digimodernist text: it critiques now what will soon be different. Scholars do frequently shift their attention from a finished text to its manuscripts or preliminary sketches, but the interest of these stems precisely from their final incorporation within a supremely complete textual end-product. On Web 2.0, though, each version of the text in time is the equal of every other; similarly, each gives an initial impression of finishedness, dispelled at varying speeds.

Equally trickily, while the forms to be studied have been chosen for me (they're sociocultural powerhouses), the practices of digimodernist analysis that they demand don't exist yet. In response to this and the other issues, I'm going to look at these forms as examples of such practice and such analysis. Each will be read in terms of a theme running through digimodernism as a whole. This will also have the beneficial effect of tying my comments into the next two chapters: finally, I see Web 2.0 as no more than a subform, albeit the most important, of a wider cultural shift, a context generally missing so far from discourse about it.

I should make clear from the outset that I come neither to bury nor praise Web 2.0. Culturally it's evident that much of what is expressed through it is ignorant, talentless, banal, egomaniacal, tasteless, or hateful; textually, though, I can't but feel that the avenues it opens up for expression are wildly exciting, unformed, up for grabs, whatever we choose to make them. This disparity is central to the spirit of the times: ours is an era more interested in cultural hardware, the means by which communication occurs (iPods, file-sharing, downloads, cell phones) than the content of cultural software (films, music, etc.); it's the exact opposite of high postmodernism. Given the speed and unpredictability of hardware innovation, this bias is understandable. It won't last forever, though; and if there is a Web 3.0 then this technologist supremacy will have to yield ground to the textual.

Also in need of reformulation will be Web 2.0's pseudopolitics. These platforms do not with any ease produce the "antifacist" and "democratic" impulses vaunted by some of their supporters. Democracy presupposes

education (this is why children are disenfranchised), but Web 2.0 offers its privileges equally to the unschooled, the fanatical, and the superstitious; in fact, it's closer to populism, that gray area between democracy and fascism. Its new gatekeepers—the ubiquitous "moderators," Wikipedia's "administrators"—are as powerful as any other, but less transparent and accountable than many; organizationally, Web 2.0 is essentially neo-elitist, part, indeed, of its very interest.

Chat Rooms (Identity)

The chat room, though perhaps less popular or less fashionable today than several years ago (it's been sidelined by newer Web 2.0 applications), is a distinctive digimodernist form. Go on to one that's in full spate and you see a scrolling page with phrases, remarks, questions, rejoinders, greetings and partings, complaints and consolations, invitations and exclamations, all rolling torrentially by. Leave it for fifteen minutes and a daunting jungle of text will spring up; what grew before you logged on is imponderable. Visually, this never-ending, forever-turning stream of communication may resemble the flowing of a minor sea, but its tide never goes out: (discreetly) compatible with many people's working habits and extending over territories and therefore time zones, the sun never sets on the chat room and the moon cannot reverse its inexorable onwardness. It's an endless communicative narrative, into which you shyly emerge.

This endlessness may manifest itself by a feeling of futility, a sense that people are throwing down comments merely in order to fight off their own boredom or loneliness, and that the "conversation" will never get anywhere or produce anything. Chat rooms provide unstoppable movement, but not progression; a discourse with such a stupefyingly high level of evanescence (even participants will struggle to recall their previous interventions) will never be able to develop consecutively toward any sophisticated communicative conclusion. Of all the Internet's digimodernist forms, the chat room seems the most open: you register, log on, and write your material, contributing in to a discursive forum. It is, of course, moderated and patrolled for unacceptable behavior, but if such is your objective you can hive off with a like-minded fellow textual contributor to a private cyberspace of your own: the broad, open chat room is thereby narrowed to a small, closed chat room, but its structure remains intact. The discourse of the chat room is whatever you make it: unlike with blogs or message boards there is no privileged intervenant but an apparent equality permits, potentially, an extraordinary expressive freedom. (And power, as your greeting is answered

instantly by a stranger 4,000 miles away.) However, the freedom to say whatever you like is exchanged here for the fact that none of what you say really matters: it's not you writing—in your anonymity, you're not at stake—and you don't know who's out there.

Much of the social comment on chat rooms has focused on "grooming": children may be accosted there by pedophiles pretending to be their age whose objective is to arrange encounters; the victims will mistakenly suppose they are meeting new friends. This scenario has been misrepresented in terms of a genuine, tangible child being misled by a deceitful adult via a chat room's anonymity (or pseudonymity). But in fact there is nobody genuine or tangible in chat rooms; everybody is invented, elusive, somewhere and nowhere. It's a discourse created by unknowns for unknowns. Morally, the issue is rather whether children should be left to roam in a universe without secure identities, their own or anyone else's. Agreeing to suspend identity, which you do on entering a chat room, taking a bogus name, concealing or lying about your age, gender, place of residence, tastes, and so on, is somewhat unusual behavior but, in principle, harmless for an independent individual whose social identity is otherwise settled. A child who does so dismantles all the systems of protection by which s/he survives socially. In short, it is the chat room that creates the problem for the child; the pedophile only exploits it. However, chat rooms are particularly popular with children precisely because their suspension of identity both chimes with the uniformedness of the infantile self and seems to offer escape from its unshakable boundaries into a field of exciting possibilities.

In short, three effects apply here. Chat rooms extend indefinitely and dissolve instantaneously text itself; they suspend the limits and particularity of the textual intervenant; and they subsume the intervenant into themselves, becoming functionally indistinguishable one from another. Being in a chat room is a loss of self and an infinite expansion of selfhood; no longer you, you become the text yourself. Your thoughts and feelings become text, and in turn create who you are; others' likewise. There's an ebbing away of human content and a seeping of the human into the text's ontology. You become a textual figure; you become a *character*, a fictive player, within an essentially fictive universe peopled only by invented selves. You are this text. It's an alluring, exciting, risky, and ultimately futile singularity.

Message Boards (Authorship)

On April 6, 2008, the London *Sunday Telegraph* published an article called "110 Best Books: The Perfect Library," which was then uploaded on to its

Web site. The article lists books sorted into eleven categories ranging from "Classics" and "Poetry" to "Sci-Fi" and "Lives." Printed out three months later the original article runs to eleven pages, each book receiving a cursory summary; for example: "Flaubert's finely crafted novel tells the story of Emma, a bored provincial wife who comforts herself with shopping and affairs. It doesn't end well." The comments on the message board beneath the article run in their turn over 52 pages, or 4 times the extent of their prompt; there are perhaps 500 separate posts. Quantitatively message boards swamp their original. Of these 500 or so, about 475 were posted within 10 days of uploading, the final 25 were spread over 2 months, and the last was dated 3 weeks before I printed. A message board functions in time like this: an initial tidal wave followed by a gradual slowing down and then a sudden drying up; its textual onwardness is contained within this cycle, and directed obscurely by an anonymous or pseudonymous moderator who also applies rules about what cannot be said. Despite this, the tone of almost all the posts is the same: they are dominated by criticism, carrying, condemnation, contradiction, complaint, and what the moderator evidently felt were acceptable kinds of abuse, that is, nonspecific, or insults aimed at groups other than minorities.

Some of the interest in looking at what people actually say on message boards is to counter the relentless propaganda promoted by Web lovers, according to which they might be a "forum" for "communication" among "communities" on a "global" scale. All of these qualities are present here technologically and functionally; however, in terms of textual content they are overwhelmed by their polar opposites, by parochialism, provincialism, isolation, bigotry, rage, prejudice, simple-mindedness, and anonymity. What message boards do is, toxically, distribute these human failings to everyone across the planet in no time at all. This is the picture that emerges from reading them all: one individual locked in a tiny room sitting at a computer screen typing out their irritation, projecting their bile into the atmosphere; and fifteen miles away a stranger doing the same; and five hundred miles away another; and so on, around the world. All of these streams of rancor and loathing then coalesce in the sky into a thin cloud of black and shallow dislike, and fall gently but dishearteningly to earth. None of the projectors is aware of any other: they spew in a void, and the contents of their irked guts are displayed potentially to everybody forever. I'd argue that this tends to be the pattern of Internet forums in general, but the one I've chosen to highlight is a particularly vivid example.

The cause here of this venom is the list: almost every post refers to it (not to the other posts). Although its title may suggest it's setting itself up as an encyclopedia for the human species, the key is found in the subcategory

"Books that changed your world." You, the implied reader, were influenced by *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *The Beauty Myth*, Delia Smith's *How to Cook*, *A Year in Provence*, *Eats Shoots and Leaves*, and *Schoff's Original Miscellany*. Self-evidently this is a list compiled with a close eye on its market, on the people who will pay to read it, the newspaper's known habitual purchasers. Market research will have guided the writers to select books aimed at Britons, usually middle-aged and older, certainly middle-class and "higher," with right-wing and traditionalist views: elsewhere in the list come *Swallows and Amazons*, Churchill's *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, and the *Diaries* of the extreme right-wing British politician Alan Clark. It also contains a large number of books that such a demographic will certainly already have read, like *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*: it's in the business of comforting its readers more than of dislocating them.

None of the posts bears in mind the identity or probable goals of the article's authors. Many of them respond as though it had been penned by some transcendent but deeply stupid entity, others as though it were effectively the work of the entire British nation. They do not consider the origins of its biases, nor do they place it in its media context as essentially a worthless, paper-filling exercise by staff writers lacking the funds necessary to send somebody out to find some actual news. It's absurdly limited in its range, but then it is aimed at, in planetary terms, a tiny and limited group of people; it's not a missive from God to the human race; it's a set of cozy recommendations for a group of people with fairly well-known tastes, which at worst will confirm them in their literary habits and at best will nudge them toward a good book they don't yet know.

The response of the posters, however, tends to be that the list is "simply ridiculous, woefully inadequate," "travaille and hype," "incredibly weak and . . . pathetic," "so obviously predictable and prejudiced," "appallingly organized," and "a load of crock." Almost all of the posts foreground the titles of books whose omission the posters find scandalous. A recurring feature is Italian posters abusing what they see as British arrogance and extolling missing Italian glories:

It's astonishing that the largest part of the literature in the list comes from places that, when China and Mediterranean cultures invented literature, were still in the stonage. It's a petty provincial list

Italian poetry is almost completely missing. I suggest Ossi di Sepia by Montale . . . But also D'Annunzio and his Alcyone is required for a perfect library!

Sono italiana e trovo piuttosto irritante che quasi tutti i libri da voi citati appartengano alla letteratura inglese . . . Insomma, manzoni? leopardi? verga? [I am Italian and I find it rather irritating that almost all the books you mention belong to English literature . . . what about Manzoni? Leopardi? Verga?]

You Anglo-Saxons make us Latin Europeans laugh!!!! Where is the true Catholic bible on this list, and other wondrous non-British literature? Remember, we Latins civilized you Britons

Hey! there's life over the earth beyond UK!!!! is not possible to describe this library list. Is always the same thing. You people are the best and only you right??? Pua!

Another recurrent group is what I presume to be Americans banging the drum for one specific American author: three out of six consecutive writers lament the absence of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, and Ayn Rand's name appears as an amazing omission on almost every page. None of these posters ever stops to ask (1) whether Rand is known or popular outside the United States, (2) whether she is known or popular in Britain, or (3) were she not, whether British people would find her to their taste. The tone, in these posts and throughout, is belligerent, certain, awedly universalistic and actually dreadfully narrow-minded: in truth Rand has no currency in Britain, or even Western Europe, and no *Telegraph* journalist would waste their energy cajoling their countrymen to read her. The Italian posts are even worse. Whatever the inadequacy of the lowest common denominator of the *Telegraph*'s famously middlebrow readership, it's fair to say that, beyond Dante, Lampredusa, and Eco, Italian literature has little or no purchase outside its country of origin. These particular posts reek of wounded arrogance, nationalism, and insularity, all subjected to transference, and possibly connected to the reelection in the month this article appeared of Silvio Berlusconi's xenophobic and quasi-fascistic administration. Such posters display nakedly what they imagine they are denouncing: the sole difference is that while the journalists are operating tactically and commercially, the posters' chauvinism is sincere (hardly a plus point, though).

Post after post simply names excluded books, though with what supposed purpose cannot be imagined: "Were is The Great Gatsby?" "So what's with the lack of Vonnegut?" "Anne Frank?" "Tolstoy, please." "And what about Kesey's One flew over the Cuckoo's Nest? Or Dashiell Hammett?" "It seems rather unbelievable to me that so far no one has mentioned Nabokov."

Nobody makes a case for their book or author. There are, as ever on message boards, a few contributions from trolls designed to annoy posters and railroad their discussion by, for instance, suggesting *Playboy* magazine; equally, there are the usual pontificating and faintly mad speeches packed with long words and complex sentences and devoid of rational points, like the one posted by Fred Marshall on April 11, 2008. And post after post goes by without anyone acknowledging another.

The overriding impression is that almost every post, whether related to the original article or other posts, appears to be driven above all by the urge to flaily disagree, to reflexively and bad-temperedly contradict. Uploading the article just seems to have acted as a kind of lightning rod for international contempt, egocentricity, and ignorance. Reading through page after page of it is dispiriting indeed, because it reveals a systemic failure of communication: in theory, contributing to an Internet forum leads you into a place of worldwide and instantaneous concert, of debate, where thought is shared and interrogated among equals; in practice it resembles the irked and near-simultaneous squawking of an infinite number of very lonely geese. Recommending a book should be an act of generosity; these posts sound petulant, hardly able to contain their fury. There is no progression here, no development, no recognition of the rest of the world: "Where is Cervantes' 'Don Quixote?'" "I must say that Miguel de Cervantes' 'Don Quixote de la Mancha' must be in the list," "No Don Quixote?" It sounds like the barking of a petty and frustrated megalomaniac.

At some stage, exhausted by wading through an unending stream of "[w]hat about 'The Jungle' by Upton Sinclair?" and "[i]n]o Dunne?" and "[t]his list stinks of intolerance and racism," you forget completely what originally triggered all of this: a meaningless and pointless itemization of very good and not very good books for genteel fifty-year-olds hankering for the return of the death penalty. You are instead lost in the void of the message board. The emotional tone and the nature of this debate are, I contend, much the same everywhere on message boards: the internationalized insularity, the rage, the preaching, the illiteracy, the abuse, the simple-minded plethora of *non sequiturs*, the flow of vapid contradiction, the impossibility of intellectual progress or even of engagement. Some boards, like those on the London *Guardian* newspaper's Comment is Free site, are of a much higher caliber than this, but usually no more fruitful or enlightening; and though some posts are worse than others the good ones are never enough to drive out the bad.

The one thing you never get on message boards is people saying that they stimulate communication and community on a global scale (they say

it in books or on TV). Instead you get this, posted by "open minded french guy" on June 8, 2008: "I am fed up with this Americano-english proudness which think themselves as the center of the world." Ten minutes later, he returned to add: "I am fed up with this egocentric of this so proudness of American-English position; the simple idea of thinking 'a perfect library' you should first watch a perfect globe." The fact that he felt his "improved" insight warranted republication tells you everything.

Blogs (Onwardness)

Of all the forms of Web 2.0, blogs might be the easiest to explain to some cultivated time traveler from the late eighteenth century who was already familiar with both diaries and ships' logs. The former he would know as a *journal intime* or intimate daily record, kept by young ladies or great men; the latter he would understand as a regular, systematic public account of external activity and events. He would probably then see blogs, fairly accurately, as a conflation of the two. Books about blogging rightly emphasize their diversity of type, purpose, readership, and content, but our time traveler might note that in his era already diaries varied in similar ways, encompassing little narratives about the quiddities of the daily routine, small essays of personal opinion, and insights into the hidden operations of power. What then is new about the blog? Its hyperlinks, obviously, by which one blog can link to a thousand other sites, but what is *textually* new?

For Jonathan Yang, the author of a guide to the subject, "[a] blog, or weblog, is a special kind of website. The main page of each blog consist [sic] of entries, or posts, arranged in a reverse chronological order—that is, with the most recent post at the top."⁹ The primacy given by blogs to the latest entry marks a first break with their textual inheritance. The entries in a diary or log progress from left to right through a book, such that internal time flows in the same direction as reading about it; but as the eye descends the screen of the blog it goes *back* in textual time. Why is this? The reason lies in the digimodernist onwardness of the blog: it's a text under development, one currently being constructed, being built up, a text emerging, growing. So is a diary or log, but they can also be read—and *are* read, by those who enjoy the diaries of public figures from Alan Clark to Samuel Pepys, of writers like Woolf or Kafka, or of someone like Anne Frank—as a finished, enclosed totality. The diary that is not being added to is *complete*; the blog in that state is *textually dead*. Another guide recommends that: "Posting at least one entry each weekday is a good benchmark for attracting and holding a readership."¹⁰ Still another warns: "There's no such thing as

a non-updated weblog, only dead websites which no one visits" and it advises bloggers to "set your update schedule . . . deliver on [your audience's] expectation that you're still there, still having thoughts, opinions, experiences, observations and you'll start to build a following."¹⁰ Readership requires the text to refructify, to extend itself, it is synonymous with the text's incompleteness of scope; and a nonupdated, hence a nonread and so a dead blog is not even memorialized: it disappears off the face of the Web as if it had never existed. No dead blogger is read; there's no e-Peyps (at least in early digimodernist principle). The blog is in thrall to its current revision and self-renewal; it is the hostage of its capacity to become ever longer, to spread, to add to itself. It is a textuality existing only now, although its contemporary growth also guarantees the continued life of its past existence (archived entries); it's like some strange entity whose old limbs remain healthy only so long as it sprouts new ones.

So much of the excitement, the interest, and the energy of digimodernism comes from the onwardness of its texts, their existence only in their present elaboration, as novels exist for the men and women who are writing them (finished, they fade forgotten into the past). Such a text is never over, always new; its creation is visible, tangible, its dynamism is palpable on the screen. As for the interest of the content, all depends here on the life and the writerly qualities of the blogger in question: the more fraught, the more world-historical an individual's circumstances, the more gripping is their blog; the more banal the life, the duller the posts; the funnier, cleverer, or more eloquent, the more vapid or egocentric or ignorant a blogger is, and the quality of the blog will vary dramatically. It is therefore absurd to have any opinion about the general interest of blogs (again as with diaries). Their mushrooming number is due to their digimodernist textual instability or haphazardness, which promises freedom, possibility, creativity, glamour. That so many bloggers cannot respond to this offer is irrelevant when so many others do.

Also in contrast to earlier modes are the blog's frequent pseudonymity and multiplicity of authorship. Some, especially those set up by organizations, may have several contributors or editors, while most include the comments and reactions of their readers, entwined with the responses of the host: "Typically, a blog will also include the ability for readers to leave comments—making the whole affair much more interactive than a traditional website."¹¹ This shouldn't though be overstated; I can't quite see that "blogging is a collaborative effort."¹² However, a definition of sorts does begin to emerge here: the blog, like Wikipedia, is an ancient form technologically reinvented for a digimodernist textual age.

Wikipedia (Competence)

Producers of text for chat rooms soon evolved a new kind of typed English, one favoring phonetic substitutes for real words ("how r u") and acronyms ("lol"), and discarding punctuation ("im ok"). This script was adopted and extended by early senders of text messages, whose cell phones could only hold a very limited number of characters. But since a chat room contribution could be, within reason, as long as you liked, and there was no physical discomfort linked to typing or obvious advantage to speed, this simplified script had no ostensible purpose. Subconsciously, I suspect, the aim was to construct chat room text in a specific way, as uninflected by issues of linguistic competence or incompetence. By reducing the number of spelled words and by eradicating punctuation, there was less and less a contributor could get linguistically wrong; by forcing all contributions into a simplified and clearly artificial and new mould, chat room text rendered all semantic and syntactical rules redundant—it outflanked them, made the issue obsolete. For its detractors, this script was the latest stage in the spread of socially valorized illiteracy; for its zealots, it liberated text, finally, from its old elitism, its legalism and dogma, its tendency to exclude and oppress.

On one hand, the emergence of this new script is another sign of the novelty of digimodernist textuality. In all the changes to text since the Enlightenment it had not been felt necessary to reinvent the English language. On the other hand, the desire for a form of text stripped or freed of questions of linguistic competence—where nobody is punished for "errors," nobody rewarded for "correctness"—had a broadly postmodern origin. If you ceaselessly call for Steven Connor's "more voices," as postmodernism does, you eventually run up against the literary shortcomings of a stubborn part of the population. Evidence of this overarching context came with the appearance of Wikipedia, not a text emptied of linguistic (in)competence but an encyclopedia stripped or freed of issues of objective intellectual (in)competence. Until this point any contributor to an encyclopedia had been compelled to offer some proof of objective qualifications: s/he would have to have passed certain exams and gained certain diplomas, to have published relevant texts of a certain importance or been appointed to certain posts. The right to contribute had then to be earned through demonstrable achievement, and subsequently to be conferred by others also applying objective criteria (this is true whatever contingent corruption may have infected the process). Wikipedia simply swept all of this away. By definition, its criteria for contributors were that they have access to the Internet and apparent information on the subject in question; to write for

Wikipedia you had to be able to write for Wikipedia, and the only person capable of assessing this ability, in principle, was yourself. Nobody would be disbarred from contributing on objective grounds. The encyclopedia had, overnight, been wrenched away from the specialists, from the professors, and given to their students to write.

Some humanities professors have had the gall to attack Wikipedia: after a lifetime spent teaching that objectivity doesn't exist, that "knowledge" and "truth" are mere social constructs, fictions, they actually had the nerve to describe this particular construct as illegitimate. On the contrary, it was easy for its enthusiasts to depict Wikipedia as the glorious fulfillment of Michel Foucault's final fantasy: the release of knowledge from its incarceration in power structures, its liberation from systems of dominance, oppression, exclusion. Condemnation by the professors only confirmed the veracity of Foucault's critique and, by extension, the emancipatory justice of the Wikipedian project. Wikipedia is, in short, a digimodernist form powered by postmodernist engines; it's the clearest instance of the submerged presence of postmodernism within contemporary culture.

For this reason, among others, Wikipedia's natural home is the English-speaking world, where post-structuralism found its most uncritical and energetic audience: its article on itself states that a comfortable majority of its "cumulative traffic" (55 percent) is in English.¹³ Within this geography, there is something stereotypically "American" about Wikipedia's integration of a sort of naivety or credulity. There is certainly something ill-advised about the method by which it accrues what it presents as "truth": if you wanted to know the capital of Swaziland or Hooker's Law you wouldn't stop someone on the street, ask them, and implicitly believe their answer; you wouldn't even approach a group of students in a bar and subsequently swear to the factuality of whatever it was they happened to tell you. The appropriate word here may, though, be not so much credulity as idealism: the belief that the mass of people will somehow conspire just by communicating with each other to throw up truth is akin to the invisible hand theory of economics (by which everyone mysteriously and inadvertently produces prosperity) and the Marxist theory of history (by which the majority of the population inevitably somehow create a free and just society). The parents and grandparents of Wikipedia's writers (or "editors") possibly marched against nuclear weapons or protested the Vietnam War; Wikipedia is one of the most striking expressions of political radicalism and idealism in our time, though it is also typical of our consumerist age that its domain isn't truly a political one. In fact, the grand illusion of believers in Wikipedia is that they are doing politics when they ought to be doing knowledge.

Debates about Wikipedia have tended systematically to miss the point. Is it reliable? What about the dangers of vandalism? Can it be corrupted by private hatreds, concealed advertising and agendas? Don't the exponential rise in its number of articles and the high frequency of their consultation indicate its epoch-making success? Yet despite their prominence in discourse about Wikipedia, none of these questions matters. First, it's not reliable, or, rather, it's as reliable as the random guy on the street or the random guys in the pub multiplied by whatever number you like, but neither is this the final word on the subject; second, the issue of vandalism, of deliberate wrecking, is just a distraction from the real problem, which is mediocrity, or unconscious wrecking; third, it is regularly infected by private intentions, though it's more telling that this can't in practice be distinguished finally from the simple act of writing it (consider why, for instance, there are so many articles on the *Star Wars* universe); and, fourth, you don't judge an encyclopedia by consumerist values—product ranges, sales volumes—any more than you judge it by political ones. You don't go to Wikipedia for freedom or turnover, but for knowledge; creating its text, you aren't sending out into the world post-structuralist *glasnost* or a commodity—you're making knowledge-claims. It is necessary here to separate the primary and the secondary, the textual item from its alleged social significance.

The crux of the matter is highlighted by the article on Thomas Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49*. After a discussion of its characters and a plot summary you come to a section titled "Allusions within the book," which recently asserted that:

The plot of *The Crying of Lot 49* is based on the plot of Graham Greene's "Brighton Rock" in which the character Ida Arnold tries to solve the mystery of Fred Hale's murder. The obscure murder of Fred Hale happens within the first chapter whereas Pierce Inverarity died under mysterious circumstances before the book began. Throughout "Brighton Rock," we follow Ida in her attempts to solve this mystery that involves her figuring out the mob played a crucial role, singing in bars, sleeping around with some fellows. While "Brighton Rock" follows Pinkie Brown, the novel's anti-hero, closer as the novel progresses, Pynchon chose to make *Crying* the story of Oedipa Maas or Ida Arnold. . . .

Pynchon, like Kurt Vonnegut, was a student at Cornell University, where he probably at least audited Vladimir Nabokov's Literature 312 class. (Nabokov himself had no recollection of him, but Nabokov's

wife Vera recalls grading Pynchon's examination papers, thanks only to his handwriting, "half printing, half script.") The year before Pynchon graduated, Nabokov's novel *Invitation of a Friend* was published in the United States; among other things, *Invitation* introduced the word "nymphet" to describe a sexually attractive girl between the ages of nine and fourteen. In following years, mainstream usage altered the word's meaning somewhat, broadening its applicability. Perhaps appropriately, Pynchon provides an early example of the modern "nymphet" usage entering the literary canon. Serge, the Paramoid's teenage counter-tenor, loses his girlfriend to a middle-aged lawyer. At one point he expresses his angst in song:

What chance has a lonely surfer boy
For the love of a surfer chick,
With all these Humbert Humbert cats
Coming on so big and sick?
For me, my baby was a woman,
For him she's just another nymphet.¹⁴

This is not vandalism: the writer¹⁵ seems sincerely to picture him or herself contributing pertinent and enlightening information about Pynchon's novel (it's not like introducing typos into the article on dyslexia). To my mind, both paragraphs strive desperately to connect a novel the contributor has read to another one s/he knows: though there's an element of detective fiction about *The Crying of Lot 49*, almost infinite are the stories that begin with a mysterious event, while three words referring to a novel known at the time to almost every American adult and written by someone Pynchon probably didn't meet do not warrant a third of a page of commentary. Had I been the author's professor, I would not have corrected this; I would simply have graded it, and badly, of course, because it isn't *wrong* so much as *not good*. It cries out for more education, wider reading, and a better understanding of how literary criticism works. How do I know this (or think I do)? Is it because I have objectively demonstrated competence in twentieth-century literature in English (qualifications, etc.)? Not exactly, since in order to recognize the poor quality of this critique you need neither a diploma nor a specialty; you just need competence. But competence is an objective quality: it doesn't emanate spontaneously from people; it has to be socially acquired somehow, and capable of display. No doubt whoever wrote these paragraphs thinks them competent; I don't know how, within Wikipedia's mechanisms and ethos, you would show him or her that they aren't. That ethos holds that they will eventually be improved, mystically

raised up to a higher level of quality. But who decides what that high quality consists of, if it doesn't consist of this? And how do you decide who decides?

Moreover, the problem of competence is not restricted to one of mediocrity. Wikipedia's article on Henry James, for instance, of which an extract follows, is as good as you could reasonably expect any encyclopedia entry to be. And yet, how do you know it's good? Who can say?

The next published of the three novels, *The Ambassadors* (1903), is a dark comedy that follows the trip of protagonist Lewis Lambert Strether to Europe in pursuit of his widowed fiancée's supposedly wayward son. Strether is to bring the young man back to the family business, but he encounters unexpected complications. The third-person narrative is told exclusively from Strether's point of view. In his preface to the *New York Edition* text of the novel, James placed this book at the top of his achievements, which has occasioned some critical disagreement. *The Golden Bowl* (1904) is a complex, intense study of marriage and adultery that completes the "major phase" and, essentially, James's career in the novel. The book explores the tangle of interrelationships between a father and daughter and their respective spouses. The novel focuses deeply and almost exclusively on the consciousness of the central characters, with sometimes obsessive detail and powerful insight.¹⁶

While this is superior to the Pynchon in every respect, the issue isn't, as I hope I've made clear, "how good" Wikipedia is, but what you can do with any entry when the objective category of intellectual competence has been abandoned. By the time you come to read this page, the online original may have been swept away and replaced by something of inferior quality, perhaps by the person who thinks Jane Austen an "influence" on Martin Amis.¹⁷ The onwardness of Wikipedia is disguised: you call up an article and it "looks" finished, though clicking on "history" may lead to five or five hundred previous versions, saved forever, and evidence that the article is in constant imperceptible evolution. Go back a month later and it may be twice as long. Without this onwardness, Wikipedia could not exist: it's the textual expression of the open-source wiki software platform. Yet, though integral to a diary (or blog) or conversation (or chat room), onwardness moves much more slowly in the realm of knowledge: our understanding of James is constantly shifting, but not so visibly as to require his encyclopedia entry to be updated every week. A print encyclopedia wouldn't need

to revise an entry like this one for ten years, but this negates the meaning and purpose of open-source software. The entry on postmodernism currently states: "This article or section is in need of attention from an expert on the subject" (and it really is),¹⁸ but there is no motivation for one to respond: becoming a specialist is a long, arduous, and costly process, producing a high-quality summary of such a difficult subject is a time-consuming and tiring act, and contributions to Wikipedia are unpaid, anonymous, and capable of being wiped out in seconds. Writing for *Encyclopedia Britannica* has (I imagine) only the first of those drawbacks. In fact, professional recognition and respect for your intellectual product are the wages that society pays for the hard and endless task of becoming competent, of becoming an expert. Wikipedia wants the latter without offering the former; in short, they want to steal your competence.

Proselytizers for Wikipedia trumpet evidence of the accuracy of certain articles to show that the project is reliable.¹⁹ This is an abuse of language: a broken clock is accurate twice a day, but you wouldn't "rely" on it to tell you the time. (Accuracy refers to truth, reliability to its expectation; Wikipedia often provides the one but can't furnish the other.) And yet an encyclopedia that can't be relied on is by definition a failure. Instead, I use, and recommend, Wikipedia as a *pre-encyclopedia*, a new kind of text and a god-send in itself: one that satisfies idle curiosity by providing answers I won't have to stake my stick on, and one that eases me into a piece of research by indicating things that I will verify later elsewhere. The watchword is *interpretability*: never to quote what you read on Wikipedia as knowledge without substantiation from a third party. In this context, and with this proviso, Wikipedia's digital mode, its hyperlinks, speed, and immensity of scale, richly compensates for its ineluctable unreliability. Stripped of its superannuated postmodernist trappings, Wikipedia can finally be seen, and appreciated, for what it really is.

YouTube (Haphazardness)

Some may feel that I have wrongly evaluated, erring on the side of overgenerosity as much as underappreciation, perhaps three of the forms discussed so far in this chapter. On one hand, blogs have been denounced by Tom Wolfe as "narcissistic shrieks and baseless 'information,'"²⁰ and by Janet Street-Porter as "the musings of the socially inept."²¹ On the other hand, a message board created by the London *Guardian* for one of its pieces recently ran a post arguing that "this is yet another article where the majority of the posters appear to take a more nuanced view than the writer."²²

(Posters, however, have no commercial obligation to be "readable" or "punchy.") I accept these points, and without self-contradiction, as I hope to show. Indeed, even I recognize that much of Wikipedia's content is so informative and useful that criticizing it as a form can feel like churlishness.

To see why these divergent views are also valid, we need to distinguish between two ways of looking at texts. They comprise what can be described as their grammar (broadly, their underlying discursive rules) and their rhetoric (simplicistically, what they actually say). These elements sometimes slot together with some strain. Agatha Christie's novels are rhetorically focused on slaughter and fear (their page-to-page material) but grammatically foreground a reassuring restoration of order (their overarching and generic systemicity). The rhetoric of *Sex and the City* emphasizes female independence, wealth, and friendship; its grammar pulls the women toward marriage, children, and home. Writing about message boards I concentrated on rhetoric, what people post on them, while my comments on Wikipedia sought to identify the necessary consequences of its grammar. Yet all this is made intractably more complex by the fact that one of the essential hallmarks of the digimodernist text is its haphazardness, that is, that fundamental to the grammar of the digimodernist text is the way in which rhetorically everything is up for grabs. The digimodernist text is classically in process, made up—within certain limits—as it goes along. The degree of haphazardness of any text is always restricted and should never be exaggerated; it corresponds to that felt by any writer (like me) trying to put together a book—indeed, it's rooted in an electronic and collective version of that earlier model—but varies in detail from one form to another.

YouTube is a digimodernist form offering a particularly high level of haphazardness. Grammatically, it's a mechanism for making freely available relatively short pieces of film: you can upload yours on to it, and watch (and pass comment on) other people's. What you put up on to it and see are entirely down to you (in the sense of "everyone"). In practice YouTube concentrates the interests of certain types of user, summarized by Michael Miller: the recorder/sharer (extracts from *Saturday Night Live*, *Opera!*), the historian/enthusiast (ancient commercials, "Classic" TV or music clips), the home-movie maker (weddings, pets, birthday parties), the video blogger (via Webcam), the instructor (professional or not), the amateur reporter (breaking news footage), the current or budding performer (of music or comedy), the aspiring filmmaker (student videos), and the online business (infomercials, etc.).²³ Though availability is constricted by copyright law, Miller is able to conclude: "So what's on YouTube tonight? As you can see, a little bit of everything!"²⁴

The range on offer can be read as a scale running from professional to amateur in terms of the *résunés*—the formal training, the technical experience—of the people who make them. YouTube places cheek by jowl highly sophisticated work by career specialists and stuff by people who scarcely know how to switch on a camcorder. For Andrew Keen this scale, or rather this duality, is precisely what is wrong with Web 2.0 which, he argues, has undermined the authority of the professional and unjustly fetishized the amateur in fields such as journalism (swamped by blogs) and encyclopedias (engulfed by Wikipedia). Recently, for instance, American newspapers have laid off their arts reviewers as more and more people choose to find out about the latest cultural offerings from unpaid and untrained bloggers. Keen decries this development, but the validity of his argument is hobbled by his ahistorically static notion of competence as necessarily enshrined in formal structures like newspapers and *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In fact, competence may be found anywhere (though it tends to cluster). A film review, for instance, needs to show competence in the areas of cinematic knowledge, accuracy of summary, articulacy of expression, and specific insight; given the tiny numbers of career film reviewers around (they hold on to their jobs for decades) it wouldn't be surprising to discover they don't have a monopoly on competence, or that there are people on the Internet who review with more freshness and sympathy than some who have been churning it out forever. Pace Keen, what matters is that, first, we valorize the category of competence, and second, those who demonstrate it are rewarded (which is linked to the first); *where* it's demonstrated is unimportant.

YouTube comes in for a bashing by Keen: "The site is an infinite gallery of amateur movies showing poor fools dancing, singing, eating, washing, shopping, driving, cleaning, sleeping, or just staring into their computers."²⁵ Yet, putting to one side the biographical issue of whether such-and-such a filmmaker was paid for his/her work, "amateurishness" in film has always been a back-construction of Hollywood's "professional" conceptions of expertise, a set of characteristics identifiable as merely the polar opposites of studio techniques: cheap stock, handheld cameras that shake and wobble, uneven sound, overlong shots, blurring, offbeam framing, the staginess of untrained actors, and so on. It's just the *modus operandi* of the "dream factory" turned inside out, making such films look neither dreamily smooth nor factory-efficient. Consequently, amateurishness looks "real," authentic, sincere, up against the "fantasy" and "commerce" of Hollywood (Dogme 95). Keen focuses on amateur contributions to YouTube since they relate to conceptions of Web 2.0 as user-generated content. But—and this

moves the debate to a digimodernist level—YouTube's haphazardness means that it encompasses amateur *and* professional material, and also that it permits the imitation of styles. While students and other unpaid wannabes seek to make their videos look "professional" in order to gain employment, the trained and salaried rough up their work to make it look real, authentic, and sincere: a studio feature film, Paramount's *Clowdfield* (2008), has even been made this way, likened by its director, by a character, and by reviewers to something off YouTube.

However, while the haphazardness of YouTube remains intact—you upload on to it whatever you want it to have—it is frequently eliminated within the individual clip, raising the question of where the limits of the haphazard lie. After all, a book (like this one) isn't being written forever. For Jonathan Zittrain, its up-for-grabs heart is the origin of the contemporary Internet's success: he warns against all attempts to restrict individual development of its content, arguing that the Internet lives on the openness that derives from infinite possibilities of personal input. His praise of the "generativity" of applications highlights what in textual form I call haphazardness: "Generativity is a system's capacity to produce unanticipated change through unfiltered contributions from broad and varied audiences."²⁶ His focus is on the Web's grammar as much as Keen observes its rhetoric: the truth is that their viewpoints coexist.

But can a text remain haphazard forever? Or, if all texts solidify in time, won't the fetishization of the haphazard trigger an incessant but vacuous shutting to new forms and abandonment of the old? In any event, on YouTube the haphazard and the amateur are closely linked: many of the home movie videos appear to have been recorded (semi-)inadvertently, showing the amazing incidents that supervened during filming of quotidian domestic moments. Such rhetorical (if forged) haphazardness sits easily here alongside its grammatical counterpart.

Facebook (Electronic)

The secret of Facebook, and I imagine those social networking sites (Bebo, MySpace) with which I'm not familiar, is its close mimicry of friendship. Opening an account is like meeting somebody socially for the first time, finding you get on well and chatting away, though with you doing all the actual talking. You tell them (you tell Facebook) your name, age, where you work and live, where you went to college and school, you allude to your political and religious views, opening up, you discuss, or rather monologue, about your favorite movies and music, TV programs and books.

As in a conversation at a party you present yourself, put yourself out there, in the hope of soliciting a complicity, shared interests; you also provide a version of your face, as interesting or beautiful as you can make it, with the general aim of coming across to others with all the élan you can muster: this is how you make friends, or keep them, or get better ones, perhaps.

As time goes by, your input into Facebook comes to feel like the electronic nourishment of your friendships. If you went clubbing and somebody took photos, you no longer get them developed at a local store and hand them around any interested parties; you upload them on to your page. If you're feeling down, or up, or tired, or excited, or anything at all, you can phone your friend and tell them or, alternatively, update your status. Should you feel like communicating with somebody *en tête à tête*, you send them a message through Facebook; but if you'd rather say something to him/her as though in a group conversation in the pub, you write on his/her wall; if you'd like to say hi but don't have the time or the inclination to chat, you poke instead. If you've just finished reading a book and want, as people often do, to tell your friends about it, there's an application that enables you to do so; or you can give them electronic gifts. Nor does Facebook mimic only existing friendships (since you're likely to do all this among people you already know). You can trace friends you've lost contact with; through the establishment of groups on subjects of common interest you can make new ones.

Of course, you can't really. None of this is "real" friendship—it's electronic friendship. It passes via a keyboard and screen; flesh-and-blood persons are not involved, only accounts; no palpable items are exchanged as gifts. Facebook nourishes friendship, but it does not provide it: the electronic interface is so integral to it that it can be defined, rather, as the *textualization of the modes of friendship*.

Facebook is so well designed, however, that it can render almost invisible this process of electronic textualization; for some, it becomes indistinguishable from actual friendship. Such people have been aghast to find the embarrassing details they revealed about their life being used by employers and authorities against them; teenagers have posted details of upcoming parties on these sites and been dismayed when hundreds of strangers turned up and trashed their absent parents' homes.²⁷ This kind of thing results from overlooking the electronic and textual mode of Facebook, which converts a private communication (a confession, an invitation) into a public one. Digimodernism, crucially underpinned by the electronic/technological, has produced a textual rupture so violent that its shock is still far from being absorbed. Indeed, in the context of Web 2.0, it's so new

that it's been embraced mostly by those for whom everything is new, the young. As a result, Web 2.0 is inflected by the proclivities and hallmarks of youth: a mode of social networking that fetishizes the kind (tight peer friendships) favored by the young; an encyclopedia written by students and the semiqualfied; a database of videos loved by the young or made by and starring them. Web 2.0 is, like rock music in the 1960s and 70s, driven by youth's energy, and just as prey to hype and idealism.

The near-invisibility of the electronic and textual status of Facebook is linked to this. Web 2.0 seems textually underanalyzed and socially over-celebrated or overdennigrated because it comes, for now, incandescent with its own novelty. But there is more going on here than that. As a modification of an existing digital mode, the Web page, not of a predigital form like the diary or encyclopedia, Facebook suggests that the drift of information technology is now toward the phenomenological elimination of the sense of the electronic interface, of the text. Increasingly, perhaps, people will feel that the gulf separating their "real" and their "textual" lives has disappeared; the thoughts, moods, and impulses of our everyday existence will translate so immediately into the electronic, textual digimodernist realm that we will no longer be conscious of transference. It won't be a question then of oscillating between offline and online, but of hovering permanently between those extremes. This conceivable development, which Facebook foreshadows, would culminate in the emergence of a new kind of human, one constituted in large part not by the "other" forms of being beloved of science fiction (robots, etc.), but by digimodernist textuality itself. In this dispensation, *you are the text*; the text is superseded.

58. I think on the whole their critical and/or commercial failure can be asserted, but not with absolute assurance. Metacritic, a Web site that aggregates published reviews, gives average rankings (out of 100) of 73, 63, and 48 for the three films respectively; it also gives average "user" (customer) scores (out of 10) of 8.1, 6.4, and 5.3, all of which suggests a dramatic falling off (retrieved October 31, 2008). The first section of William Irwin (ed.), *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded* (Petra, IL: Open Court, 2005) is called "The Sequels: Suck-Fest or Success?" with a first chapter by Lou Marinoff subtitled "Why the Sequels Failed." As Wikipedia notes, "the quality of the sequels is still a matter of debate" ("The Matrix [series]," retrieved October 31, 2008). The tendency is unmistakable, but not conclusive.

59. Both float whimsically romantic hypotheses about the inspiration for the national playwright's breakthrough (transculturality, *passtiche*).
60. *Hollywood Ending*, unreleased in any form in Britain, was called "old, tired and given-up-on" by the *Washington Post*, while *Melinda and Melinda* was described as "worn and familiar" by *Village Voice*.
61. Famously described by Tibor Fischer in the *London Daily Telegraph* as "like your favorite uncle being caught in a school playground, masturbating."
62. Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Methuen, 1987; Ian Gregson, *Postmodern Literature*. London: Arnold, 2004.
63. Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2002, p. 165.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
66. Andrew Hoberak, "Introduction: After Postmodernism" in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Fall 2007), p. 233.
67. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 48. Emphasis removed.
68. Steven Connor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 1.
69. *Ibid.*

2. The Digimodernist Text

1. Adapted from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 946, 1215.
2. Espen J. Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 1. Emphasis added.
3. Al Gore, *The Assault on Reason*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.
4. Colin MacCabe, *Performance*. London: BFI, 1998, p. 78.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
7. Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, pp. 64–65.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 66. Emphasis added.

9. Raman Selden, *Practicing Theory and Reading Literature*. Harlow: Pearson, 1989, pp. 113, 120.
 10. *Ibid.*, p. 125. Emphasis added.
 11. Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath. London: Flamingo, 1984, pp. 157, 159, 160, 161, 164 (translation modified). Emphases in original.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 157. Emphasis in original.
 13. *Ibid.*, pp. 162–63.
 14. J. Hillis Miller, "Performativity as Performance/Performativity as Speech Act: Derrida's Special Theory of Performativity" in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 106, no. 2 (Spring 2007), p. 220.
 15. Barthes, "From Work to Text," p. 164.
 16. Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *Image Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath. London: Flamingo, 1984, pp. 148, 145.
 17. Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" trans. Josué V. Harari, in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josué V. Harari. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979, pp. 141–60. For a more recent view, see Sean Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, 2nd edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.
 18. John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. London: Vintage, 1996, pp. 97, 388, 389.
 19. Martin Amis, *Money*. London: Penguin, 1985, p. 247; Martin Amis, *The Information*. London: Flamingo, 1995, p. 300.
 20. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. London: Abacus, 1980, pp. 125, 127, 129.
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
 22. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988, p. 62.
 23. For certain languages, like Arabic and Japanese, other directions are clearly involved.
- ## 3. A Prehistory of Digimodernism
1. Michael Kirby's *Happenings* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1965) is an anthology of statements, scripts, and production notes for happenings orchestrated by Allan Kaprow (including his seminal 1959 piece "18 Happenings in 6 Parts"), Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and others. Based on first-hand textual experiences inaccessible to me, it's recommended as a replacement of sorts for the section "missing" from this chapter.
 2. Laurence O'Toole, *Pornocopia: Porn, Sex, Technology and Desire*, 2nd edition. London: Serpent's Tail, 1999, p. vii. Both well researched and naïve, O'Toole's book reflects the immense difficulties intelligent discussion of pornography faces, caused, to a great extent, by the forms digimodernist shattering of conventional meta-textual categories.
 3. Michael Allen, *Contemporary US Cinema*. Harlow: Pearson, 2003, p. 162.
 4. Ceclax first went live in the mid-1970s, but take up was initially slow.

5. It was ever thus: mid-1980s' research already found that heavy users tended to be male. See Bradley S. Greenberg and Carolyn A. Lin, *Patterns of Teletext Use in the UK*. London: John Libbey, 1988, pp. 12, 47.
6. See for instance, the Wikipedia entry on international teletext: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teletext> Retrieved January 26, 2008.
7. The title conflates those of the TV game-show *What's My Line* (originally CBS 1950-67, BBC 1951-63) and Brian Clark's TV play *Whose Life is It Anyway?* (ITV 1972, remade by MGM as a feature film in 1981).
8. Slatery was almost destroyed by the show (among other pressures), while Sessions, McShane, Proops, Stiles, and Lawrence never broke out of the cultural margins. One or two performers did, like Stephen Fry and Paul Merton, but through other shows.
9. Sean Bidder, *Pump up the Volume: A History of House*. London: Channel 4 Books, 2001.
10. B. S. Johnson, *The Uryfortunates*. London: Panther Books in association with Secker & Warburg, 1969, inside left of box.
11. *Ibid.*, "First," p. 4.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3.
13. Jonathan Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant: The Story of B. S. Johnson*. London: Picador, 2004, pp. 230, 269.
14. For a good essay on related issues see Kaye Mitchell, "The Uryfortunates: Hypertext, Linearity and the Act of Reading" in *Re-Reading B. S. Johnson*, ed. Philip Tew and Glyn White, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 51-64.
15. Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, pp. 269-70.
16. John Fowles, *The Collector*. London: Vintage, 2004, p. 162; Martin Amis, *Dead Babies*. London: Vintage, 2004, p. 21. (Amis echoes, deliberately or not, a phrase in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, chap. 4.)
17. Coe, *Like a Fiery Elephant*, p. 352.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-31.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
20. Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, trans. Gregory Rabassa. London: Harvill Press, 1967, unnumbered page.
21. Edward Packard, *The Cave of Time*. London: W. H. Allen, 1980, p. 1.
22. For an "adult" version of this narrative form see Kim Newman, *Life's Lottery*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1999.
23. Gill Davies, *Staging a Pantomime*. London: A&C Black, 1995, p. 90. Ellipses in original.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
25. Tina Bicat, *Pantomime*. Marlborough: Crowood Press, 2004, p. 25.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Lawrence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, p. 376.
29. Other derivations have also been proposed.

4. Digimodernism and Web 2.0

1. Connor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, pp. 14-15.
2. Quoted in <http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/podcast/dw/cm-int082206text.html> Retrieved September 18, 2008.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2 Retrieved June 16, 2008.
4. *Ibid.*
5. David Jennings, *Net, Blogs and Rock 'n' Roll*. London: Nicholas Brealey, 2007, pp. 136-41.
6. This becomes clear when that room text is reproduced (or mimicked) within the covers of a book, as in Sam North's novel *The Velvet Rooms*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2006.
7. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.html?xml=/arts/2008/04/06/nospit/sv_classics06.xml Retrieved July 16, 2008. Many of the quotations here could have been furnished with such extensive use of the parenthesis [sic] they would have become unreadable; it has consequently been omitted from this section only.
8. Jonathan Yang, *The Rough Guide to Blogging*. London: Rough Guides, 2006, p. 3.
9. Brad Hill, *Blogging for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2006, p. 39.
10. Nat McBride and Jamie Cason, *Teach Yourself Blogging*. London: Hodder Education, 2006, pp. 15, 15-16.
11. Yang, *The Rough Guide to Blogging*, p. 3.
12. McBride and Cason, *Teach Yourself Blogging*, p. 153.
13. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia> Retrieved July 7, 2008.
14. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crying_of_Lot_49 Retrieved July 16, 2008.
15. In fact I've no idea how many people worked on these sections. The singular is used here as a grammatical convention.
16. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_James Retrieved July 16, 2008.
17. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Amis Retrieved July 16, 2008. Hard to imagine a Jane Austen character called Fucker. The article also suffers from Wikipedia's vulnerability to breaking news, giving undue importance to trivial but recent media squabbles.
18. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism> Retrieved July 9, 2008.
19. See, for instance, any of Wikipedia's articles about itself.
20. Tom Wolfe, "A Universe of Rumors" in *Wall Street Journal*, July 14, 2007, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118436667045766268.html> Retrieved August 28, 2008.
21. Janet Street-Porter, "Just Blog Off" in London *Independent on Sunday*, January 6, 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/janet-street-porter/editorat-large-just-blog-off-and-take-your-self-promotion-and-cat-flap-with-you-768491.html> Retrieved August 28, 2008.
22. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/2008/aug/27/ohverfoodanddrink?commenpage=1> Retrieved August 28, 2008.
23. Michael Miller, *You Tube 4 You*. Indianapolis, IN: Que Publishing, 2007, pp. 76-86.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

25. Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today's Internet is Killing Our Culture and Assailing Our Economy*. London: Nicholas Brealey, 2007, p. 5.
26. Jonathan Zittrain, *The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It*. London: Allen Lane, 2008, p. 70. Emphasis removed.
27. See David Randall and Victoria Richards, "Facebook Can Ruin Your Life. And so Can MySpace, Bebo . . ." in *London Independent on Sunday*, February 10, 2008. www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/.../facebook-can-ruin-your-life-and-so-can-myspace-bebo-780521.html Retrieved September 21, 2008. Anon, "Web Retailers Wreck Family Home," BBC News Web site, April 12, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/wear/6549267.stm> Retrieved September 1, 2008.

5. Digimodernist Aesthetics

1. Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Hymn to Proserpine."
2. A good overview of these positions is to be found in Robert W. Writkin, *Adorno on Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 2003.
3. As a contrast to the above, sample Robert Minkisch, *Roll Over Adorno: Critical Theory, Popular Culture, Audiovisual Media*. New York: SUNY Press, 2006.
4. My source is Wikipedia; the tendency is so overwhelming that absolute precision in the data becomes irrelevant.
5. The gay market for this kind of music is a secondary, derived one.
6. Countries that impose tighter controls on the possession of credit cards, like France, Spain, and Italy, show a correspondingly weaker form of this shift in scheduling.
7. Friends (NBC), "The One with Rachel's Assistant," season 7 episode 4, first transmitted October 26, 2000.
8. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magi> Retrieved August 30, 2008.
9. Catherine Constable, "Postmodernism and Film" in Connor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, pp. 53-59.
10. Sunam Gupta, *Re-Reading Harry Potter*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 9.
11. Jean Baudrillard, "History: A Retro Scenario" in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p. 43. Emphasis added.
12. Cindy Sherman, *The Complete Untitled Film Stills*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2003, p. 9.
13. Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*. London: Vintage, 2000, pp. 117-18.
14. Baudrillard posed this question in 1981 about the subjects of the proto-reality TV show *An American Family*, first aired in 1973 ("The Precession of Simulacra" in *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 28). Such shows used to appear once a decade; now they launch every week. When in 2008 Channel 4 screened a structural remake of the program that so exercised Baudrillard, a British TV critic noted presciently: "it won't have the same impact . . . Reality shows, for want of a better expression, are now the norm" (Alison Graham, "Déjà View" in *London Radio Times*, September 13-19, 2008, p. 47).

15. Hill, *Blagging for Dummies*, p. 268.
16. Ben Walters, *The Office*. London: BFI, 2005, p. 3.
17. *Faking It* (Channel 4, 2000-05); *The Edwardian Country House* (Channel 4, 2002); *The Superstizers Go Restrained* (BBC2, 2008).
18. Baudrillard, "History: A Retro Scenario," p. 44.
19. Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, 2nd edition. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982, p. 268.
20. Stuart Sim, *Jomy and Crisis: A Critical History of Postmodern Culture*. Cambridge: Icon, 2002.
21. Stanley Aronowitz, *Dead Artists, Live Theories and Other Cultural Problems*. London: Routledge, 1994, p. 40. Emphasis added.
22. Adair, *The Postmodernist Always Rings Twice*, p. 14.
23. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Sincerity Retrieved March 28, 2008.
24. Lawrence Kasdan (dir.), *French Kiss* (20th Century Fox, 1995).
25. George Lucas (dir.), *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (20th Century Fox, 1999).
26. Sam Raimi (dir.), *Spider-Man* (Columbia, 2002).
27. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 23.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
30. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel 1878-2001*, rev. edition. London: Penguin, 2001, p. 505.
31. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Foreword to the Second Edition" in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: HarperCollins, 2007, p. xxv.
32. Alison McMahon, *The Films of Tim Burton: Animating Live Action in Contemporary Hollywood*. London: Continuum, 2005, p. 238.
33. Gavin Keulke, "W(h)ither Postmodernism: Late Amis" in *Martin Amis: Postmodernism and Beyond*, ed. Gavin Keulke. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 159.
34. Jansson, *Postmodernism*, p. 300.
35. Friends (NBC), "The One with the Breast Milk," season 2 episode 2, first transmitted September 28, 1995.

6. Digimodernist Culture

1. Amis, *The Information*, pp. 435-36. Emphases in original.
2. Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1989.
3. Connor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*.
4. Jansson, *Postmodernism*, p. 299.
5. "Videogames" here encompass all software-based electronic games whatever platform they may be played on, and are synonymous with "computer games." Academically the definition is moot, but mine is closer to the popular sense of the word.