

## BOOK REVIEW

**COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE ARISES FROM MULTIMODAL,  
DIALOGIC INTERTEXTUALITY: *LEARNING IN THE AGE OF  
DIGITAL REASON* (2017) BY PETAR JANDRIĆ**

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*Learning in the age of digital reason* weaves the threads of Petar Jandrić's dialogues with diverse critical thinkers into a compendium of contemporary transdisciplinary approaches to digital media and learning.

The book is divided into five thematic sections determined by the major field of interlocutors' contribution, albeit it can be argued that most chapters offer cross-sectional insights: History and Philosophy, Media Studies, Education, Practice and Activism, and Arts, each consisting of three chapters. Petar is himself interviewed in the final chapter, reflecting back on the book and the making of it.

The book's author, Petar Jandrić, is an emerging critical thinker to be aware of, having published a number of thought provoking pieces, often collaborating with recognised authors in critical theory, educational philosophy and technology. He is throwing a (dialogic) party in *Learning in the age of digital reason* with interlocutors chosen in line with personal sensibility, many of whom are friends and fellow thinkers, mainly working in leftist/radical/critical/Marxist/activist traditions, opposing the global neoliberal agenda and capitalist tendencies in education and technology mediation.

The soul of this party is a distinctly critical, historical and personal examination of the relationship between education and technology from various vantage points and rich experiences. Jandrić's interlocutors have made and are making a lasting legacy in contemporary approaches to learning and schooling (in order of appearance in chapters): Larry Cuban, Andrew Feenberg, Michael Adrian Peters; Fred Turner, Richard Barbrook, McKenzie Wark; Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, Sian Bayne; Howard Rheingold, Astra Taylor, Marcell Mars, Tomislav Medak; Paul Levinson, Kathy Rae Huffman, Dmitry Vilensky; Christine Sinclair and

Hamish MacLeod. Conversations in the section on Arts are enhanced by collaboration with Ana Kuzmanić and one by Ana Peraica.

The substance of the party is its dialogic form that provided the author with an opportunity to display a compelling richness of knowledge when it comes to his interlocutors' work, as well as a wide range of related references and examples provided by him and all discussants. I turn to this explicit intertextual value of Jandrić's book to emphasise this engaging work. I do so after a succinct overview of thematic sections that cannot do justice to the layered wealth of insights and points raised and provided in the chapters, but will hopefully generate interest to read Jandrić's book.

Each chapter starts with a biographical note on the interlocutor, hence providing a useful interlude to the dialogue. The first section (Chapters I (Cuban), II (Feenberg) and III (Peters)) considers critical, historical and philosophical underpinnings of the relationship between education and technology. The very words in the title of the first two chapters clearly signal the critical attitude to the hype of technology in education: 'the dubious promise (I)' and 'the bursting boiler (II)' with chapter III providing reflections on free speech, the politics of the internet and the value of collective creativity and intellect, the staple value of this book's style and content.

The following section focuses on digital education more from the perspective of media and communication theory and history by Turner (IV), Barbrook (V) and Wark (VI). This section, as expected, emphasises the importance of various media in knowledge building and countercultures, discussing, among other topics, Wired magazine, radio activism, McLuhan, Silicon Valley, the Anthropocene, and gaming. Section three unpacks ideas from critical education thinkers (Giroux, McLaren and Bayne) raising questions and reflecting on whether and how education has been changed by the digital from critical pedagogy, human and posthuman perspectives, and why it is important to engage in digital education from these perspectives. The fourth section in dialogue with Rheingold, Taylor, and Mars and Medak, tackles practice and activism, raising important questions on the relationship between the mind and technology, (de)institutionalisation of education and the importance of doing activism, not just being critical. The final thematic section considers the role of the arts in digital education (Levinson, Huffman and Vilensky), contemplating the arts in relation to science, science fiction, curation, collectives, emotions, discipline and the quest for equality. It is an important section, especially in light of the constant devaluation and marginalisation of the arts in neoliberal education, whereas the book's message is that the arts are intrinsically embedded in education and technology, especially as critical practices.

The closing chapter delegates the 'interviewer' or better to say the dialogic lead role to Sinclair and MacLeod, who lead the dialogue with Jandrić, wrapping up the ideas in the book and interrogating the processes of book creation and the work of

the author. It is hard to summarise the book's content within a limited review space, since it is literally bursting with thought-provoking ideas and commentaries.

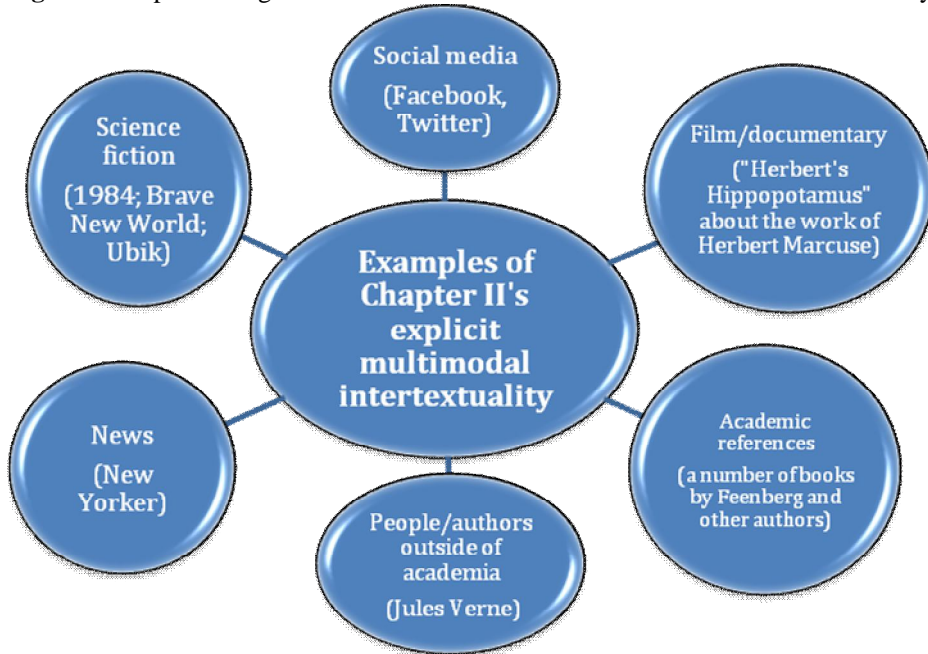
Going back to my intention to explain the value of intertextuality in *Learning in the age of digital reason*, evoking the fields that the book does not (overtly) cover (semiotics and multimodality as distinct approaches to communication), I must first say that intertextuality is a complex and contested term. Here, intertextuality serves the purpose of highlighting the relational nature of knowledge in the book's dialogic form, the view akin to Bakhtin (1981; Todorov, 1984)'s, and Barthes' (1971; 1975) synthesised by Kristeva (1980) who coined the term. The core idea of relational knowledge in intertextuality adopted in this review is the one of text depending on the 'figure of the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the "already written" and the "already read". Every text has its meaning in relation to other texts' (Allen, 2011, pp. 5–6). The internet is such an intertextual web. It is important to note that intertextuality exists at the cross road of references, inspirations, interpretations and associations located both in the text (provided, intended, unintended, implicit, explicit) and in the readers' mind (the cognitive side of intertextuality), emerging from an accumulation of all the information, seen, heard and read, conditioned by socio-cultural circumstances. The reading and ideological meaning of intertextuality is important to note, but for the purpose of this review, the focus is on explicitly provided references to the work of others.

An academic text is a particular case of explicit intertextuality since it commonly contains explicit references to the work of others. Jandrić's book clearly exemplified how dialogue is developed via intertextuality – by references to other texts provided in the book and embedded in Jandrić's questions to his interlocutors, by associations they evoke in them (commonly providing references to further texts) and certainly by readers' associations to other texts. What is distinct about explicit intertextuality of academic text is that it operates within disciplinary codes and it provides a direct source of the writer's interpretation of that source. The readers, if they are not familiar with it, but want to learn more and form their own interpretation, can find and read it. In a dialogic book such as Jandrić's, various references also serve the function of a dialogic prompt, a trigger, an elicitation tool for dialogues. Such dialogues involve constant interpretations of intertextual references by the participants in each one, and by the reader as the third interpreter.

Text here is defined not only via the linguistic mode, but via various modalities that mediate communication and meaning, and are interpreted by readers. Therefore, intertextuality is also multimodal. Multimodality (Kress, 2009; Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran, 2016) of intertextuality is exemplified via references in a linguistic, academic text to texts in various other media and modes, such as film, fiction, science fiction, news, art, performance, architecture, scientific and technological artefacts. Some multimodal intertextual references feature in more than one chapter of Jandrić's book (e.g. *Neuromancer* (science fiction), and *Wired* magazine).

To illustrate the mentioned explicit multimodal intertextuality, I took as an example Chapter II dialogue with Andrew Feenberg. I created a diagram of various references mentioned in that chapter (Figure 1), including academic references that add to the multimodal mix.

**Figure 1** Chapter II diagram of references that constitute its multimodal intertextuality.



The dialogues in all chapters are built around a rich tapestry of multimodal intertextuality, evoking, for example *Frankenstein*, *The Economist*, *Space Odyssey 2001*, cyborgs, libraries, and *The Little Prince*, to mention but a few! In that sense, *Learning in the age of digital reason* is a clear example of how knowledge can only be built in relation to other people, their work and artefacts. This reminded me of the idea of “lone genius” challenged by Dean Keith Simonton, Professor Emeritus at University of California, Davis, who stresses the importance of social networks for the growth and creation of knowledge and the rise of an exceptional creator. This is contrasted to the importance of individual traits and genius that are highly overstated in the society (Kalb, 2017). Indeed, social and communal networks’ actions, activism and bases of knowledge provide conditions for the flourishing of individuals and their knowledge, who in turn should not only contribute to the self(-success/-power/-prosperity) but also to the society. This is in line with the author’s and many interlocutors’ stance and at the heart of this book, reminding the reader that our individual creations are at the same time products of collective knowledge, circumstances and networks, including material artefacts.

Some readers might not share all of and the same critical/radical/leftist/Marxist perspectives, some might want other critical lenses such as feminist, or might wish for more diverse interlocutors (e.g. non-white, more females, albeit Jandrić is explicit that ideally that would be the case and admits that the book lingers more towards male and western thinkers), and more synthesis of the chapters' inter-relational message and linkages in the closing of the book. Yet, this is arguably an inspirational book for every reader, academic and student, interested in and contemplating the big question of what it means to learn, think and live as mediated by technology. As summarised in Turner's words, 'this book is a document of our times' (Jandrić, 2017: 367). Written with captivating honesty and passion, *Learning in the age of digital reason* is a work of major collective educational effort and imagination: an event I greatly enjoyed; an intellectual party par excellence.

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