

Resisting the Final Word: Challenging stale media and policy representations of students' performative technological encounters in university education

Sarah Hayes

Aston University, Birmingham, UK, S.HAYES@aston.ac.uk

Petar Jandrić

University of Applied Sciences, Zagreb, Croatia, pjandric@tvz.hr

Abstract

This article explores powerful, constraining representations of encounters between digital technologies and the bodies of students and teachers, using corpus-based Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It discusses examples from a corpus of UK Higher Education (HE) policy documents, and considers how confronting such documents may strengthen arguments from educators against narrow representations of an automatically enhanced learning. Examples reveal that a promise of enhanced 'student experience' through information and communication technologies internalizes the ideological constructs of technology and policy makers, to reinforce a primary logic of exchange value. The identified dominant discursive patterns are closely linked to the Californian ideology. By exposing these texts, they provide a form of 'linguistic resistance' for educators to disrupt powerful processes that serve the interests of a neoliberal social imaginary. To mine this current crisis of education, the authors introduce productive links between a Networked Learning approach and a posthumanist perspective. The Networked Learning approach emphasises conscious choices between political alternatives, which in turn could help us reconsider ways we write about digital technologies in policy. Then, based on the works of Haraway, Hayles, and Wark, a posthumanist perspective places human digital learning encounters at the juncture of non-humans and politics. Connections between the Networked Learning approach and the posthumanist perspective are necessary in order to replace a discourse of (mis)representations with a more performative view towards the digital human body, which then becomes situated at the centre of teaching and learning. In practice, however, establishing these connections is much more complex than resorting to the typically straightforward common sense discourse encountered in the Critical Discourse Analysis, and this may yet limit practical applications of this research in policy making.

Keywords

Networked Learning, Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA, student experience, digital human body, neoliberalism, posthumanism, performative, cyborg, cognisphere, Anthropocene

Introduction

In modern global society we are accustomed to textual and visual representations. In government policies, these representations come to constitute and shape powerful political agendas as common sense. However, all representations are 'inevitably partial, historically contingent interpretations' (Bleiker, 2009: 5). Bleiker points out that though photographs are seemingly authentic reproductions of external realities, they are taken at certain times of the day, from a particular angle. Similarly, with written texts, choices are made and values applied, within an inherently political exercise leading sometimes to significant mis-representations. Whilst some mis-representations are not necessarily deliberate, it is still necessary to confront these in policy and media, and contrast them with more aesthetic and performative forms of understanding, that acknowledge human thinking, labour and emotions. By 'performative' we refer to how the reality of digital learning is performed in a variety of practices (Mol, 1999). Such a multiplicity, where many factors are interdependent on each other is made up of human and non human actors, words and politics. Bleiker suggests humans are 'herd animals' and 'we often take the path of least linguistic resistance' (Bleiker, 2009: 5). However, the path of least linguistic resistance, and its links to common sense representations are intertwined with powerful underlying worldviews, values and ideologies and potential actors are inextricably linked up with how these are enacted (Mol, 1999).

To confront this, we separate common sense, generalised representations from a politics advocated by Networked Learning, that involves people making conscious choices between alternative political approaches (Steeple and Jones, 2002: 2). Networked Learning, NL hereafter, applied to the use of digital technologies in higher education, is understood 'to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources (Goodyear, et al., 2004:1). As just one way to discuss educational technology, it is considered to be 'relational' between all of these things (Jones, 2012: 3). In a networked learning approach, technology is not simply a neutral object that in modern life dictates the pace of human development, nor is it just a subject that we write about, expecting to be able to use it for automatic economic gain through increased performance. Instead, technology is 'a dialectical process of material and linguistic negotiation between competing social forces' across networks (Hayes & Jandrić, 2014: 194). This approach therefore requires clear acknowledgement of how non-humans and humans are inextricably intertwined, to form digital human bodies in contemporary learning situations. Yet, in contrast to this broad understanding of NL, in policy for educational technology in recent decades, we still find a rarely critiqued, rational underlying assumption that implementing new technologies, in themselves, determines learning.

In this article we provide a particular form of linguistic resistance, through Critical Discourse Analysis, CDA hereafter, to strengthen the case against narrow mis-representations that simply reinforce the interests of a neoliberal social imaginary. We reflexively acknowledge that our work is another form of representation in itself, but we suggest it also provides a means to re-open a fixed discourse to consider alternatives that productively link posthumanist perspectives and NL. By reading and confronting the 'words' we have extracted from recent policies we suggest this opens new routes to 'reading the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987: 35). The 'network society' (van Dijk, 1999; Castells, 2001) as a social setting, potentially offers a different form of political organisation from either bureaucratic hierarchies or the anarchy of the market (Thompson, et al., 1991). We suggest it is also necessary to acknowledge that non-human as well as human politics are intertwined around digital learners' situated, networked experiences. Only then is the myth of 'enhancing the student experience' (HEFCE, 2015) fully exposed. Increased use of digital networks in education cannot be assumed to lead directly to NL. We therefore review the literature to identify discursive opportunities to place a more performative, posthumanist view towards the digital human body, at the centre of debates about NL.

Learning, technologies, and common sense narratives

In earlier publications (Hayes and Jandrić, 2014, Hayes and Bartholomew, 2015) we drew attention to a simple economic calculation, a form of 'exchange value' (Marx, 1867) often repeated in HE policy that suggests that in exchange for the use of technology there will be enhanced forms of learning. Here we draw on further examples from a corpus of 2.5 million words of UK government policy and university strategy texts, written between 1997 and 2012, to consider the positioning of students and staff in relation to educational technology. Whilst there are many ways to conduct analysis, we describe a corpus-based CDA. A corpus is a large collection of real instances of language use written by many different human beings in different contexts and times. Yet, as examples below show, there are surprising patterns of repetition.

Corpus linguistics provides a principled way to quantitatively search written texts to examine constructions of language (Baker, 2006) as they appear in concordance lines (see below). A more qualitative approach, through CDA (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), can then examine findings in relation to critical theory. Firstly, we consider how the labour of students and staff in digital learning situations is represented in patterns around the term: 'the student experience'. Secondly, we discuss how exposing these examples might support and strengthen resistance by educators writing in the media, to help 'disrupt the powerful processes that serve the interests of the neoliberal social imaginary' (Ford, Porfilio, & Goldstein, 2015: 1). In this first set of concordance lines we examine the positioning of students and technology around the term: 'the student experience':

213	the use of e-portfolios has been shown to have a direct impact on enriching the student experience
214	the use and implementation of e-learning to enhance the student experience
1439	'while the strategy's primary focus is on learning, it relates to all aspects of the student experience
5447	the use of technology to enhance the student learning experience
6124	e-learning will be vital in widening participation and enhancing the student experience

6137 the university will provide an outstanding **student experience**, with teaching informed by research work

Above, each mention of a form of technology is repeatedly followed by the assumption of a positive learning outcome through phrases like 'direct impact', 'to enhance' and 'to realise'. This common pattern suggests an exchange value for improving learning automatically follows. The inference through 'the student experience' is that each gain for learning is universal and the same for everyone. These examples help us to linguistically confront concerns raised by educators, such as Peter Scott. Writing in *The Guardian*, he voices alarm that the complexity of the experiences of students: 'becomes reduced to a one-size-fits-all definition, in the term: the student experience'. As an academic, Scott uses the news media to point out that this current buzz phrase over-emphasizes: 'short-term satisfaction as measured in instrumental and transactional terms' (Scott, 2014). He adds:

But like most market-speak labels, it conceals more than it reveals. What is the 'student experience'? Does it focus on the process of being a student – and, if so, is good teaching more (or less) important than facilities like accommodation, bars, swimming pools, night life? Or is the 'student experience' about the product, winning a place at a 'top' university, getting a good job or being able to sport a high-status 'brand'? (Scott, 2014)

To address Scott's questions, we can look closely at both 'processes' and 'products' in this discourse, through a CDA technique called 'transitivity analysis' (Halliday, 1994). This involves labelling the grammatical patterns of verbs to reveal what processes are prioritised and who/what is actually 'doing' these. There is not scope in this article to describe in detail the methodology of transitivity analysis, simply to say that it helps to identify who does what to whom (Halliday, 1994). Please see Hayes and Bartholomew (2015) for more on the specific features of this approach applied to educational technology policy analysis. Here, we simply explain what trends might be noticed that position students and their learning activities, in relation to the 'promise' of technology. Firstly, a noun (e.g. 'the use of a technology' or 'the use and implementation of e-learning') often undertakes processes (verbs) such as: 'to enhance', 'improve', etc. Such actions in the context of teaching would usually be attributed to a human, such as a lecturer, student, administrator or manager. Instead, a textual construction, not a human being, is attributed with this labour. In linguistics, changing an active process of using technology into 'the use of technology' is called a 'nominalisation' and it refers to a verb being changed into a noun. When we write in this way, e.g. in corpus line 5447 below, there are implications which may not at first be apparent:

5447 the use of technology to enhance **the student learning experience**

If 'the use of a technology' is to enhance the student learning experience, does this offer any space for students themselves to actively participate in their own learning and diverse, individual processes of 'becoming' in higher education (Dall'Alba, & Barnacle, 2007)? If humans are co-evolving with technologies as interconnected complex systems then technology or indeed e-learning, does not simply 'enhance' (Hayles, 2006). Yet below in line 5224 we find that it is a 'strategy for e-learning' that supposedly 'strives' to realise the vision to enhance the student learning experience:

5224 this strategy for e-learning strives to realise the following vision to use e-learning to enhance **the student learning experience**

To attribute the mental process of 'striving' to a strategy could simply be dismissed as a turn of phrase, yet a closer look reveals a strong repetition across many examples that is worth questioning. Considering too the points raised by Scott, about how far this concept extends beyond learning and into a student's lifestyle, in corpus line 1439 below we find a clear reply:

1439 while the strategy's primary focus is on learning, it relates to all aspects of **the student experience**

1439 confirms that the focus is on *all aspects* of the student experience, which again, positions students passively as having little apparent role in their own range of experiences at university. Furthermore, it tells us nothing about who is really taking this approach, given that it is 'the strategy's primary focus', and not that of a human being. This statement is curiously contradictory to the current ubiquitous buzzword of 'student engagement' (Gibbs, 2014). Here Gibbs, like Scott (2014), uses news media to raise concerns at the 'opaque'

term of ‘student engagement’, recently coined in policy to refer to: ‘so many different things that it is difficult to keep track of what people are actually talking about’ (Gibbs, 2014). The call for staff to ‘embed’ ‘student engagement’ is a repeated theme, as in these examples, from a newer corpus of student engagement policies:

- 70 We want to support professional services in embracing and embedding **student engagement** as part of their day to day practice
- 147 We want to build on good practice from the likes of ICT Services and the Library to embed **student engagement** across professional support departments

In 70 and 147 the performative experiences of students are an objective entitled ‘student engagement’. Whilst this represents students again as passive, it also positions staff as responsible for embedding this objective. In further examples from this corpus below, staff are clearly expected to enhance: ‘the student experience’:

- 1052 identifying how emergent technologies impact the relationships between tutors-as-facilitators and learners as partners is pivotal in enhancing **the student experience**
- 5890 provide a valid mechanism for the recognition of excellence in the use and implementation of e-learning to enhance **the student experience**
- 6140 the university to innovate in the use of technologies to enhance **the student experience**
- 6156 share best practice in the use of technologies to enhance **the student experience**
- 6516 increase staff development ‘taster’ courses in the use of TEL that leads to clearly identifiable enhancement of **the student experience**

In 1052, the assumption is on how emergent technologies ‘impact’ on the relationships between tutors and learners as partners, positioning staff and students as passive in ‘having this done to them’:

- 1052 identifying how emergent technologies impact the relationships between tutors-as-facilitators and learners as partners is pivotal in enhancing **the student experience**

Rather than identifying complex aesthetic and performative forms of human understanding, labour and emotions in these relationships, the ‘impact’ from ‘emergent technologies’ is deemed to be pivotal in enhancing the student experience.

In row 4086 there is a call to save staff time:

- 4086 raise the profile of examples of TEL for enhancement of **the student experience** and to save staff time

This assumes a direct connection, or form of exchange value in saved staff time, from a call to ‘raise the profile of examples of TEL’, but it takes a lot of individual unseen hours of academic labour to design innovative teaching. We refer to this as ‘unseen’ both because it is not easy to account for, but also because, as illustrated below, it remains unacknowledged in policy texts that simply attribute staff innovation to ‘the university’:

- 6140 the university to innovate in the use of technologies to enhance **the student experience**

Staff are urged in 6156 to:

- 6156 share best practice in the use of technologies to enhance **the student experience**

This assumes other pre-existing practices must simply always be open to being made ‘better’ (Bayne, 2014) and that a ‘best’ practice may be achieved and shared. Furthermore below in 6226, senior management are expected to identify ‘new imaginative business processes’ that are attributed with the ability to enhance ‘the student experience’ and increase staff productivity in their research:

- 6226 senior management to identify new imaginative business processes, to improve the efficiency of the institution, enhance **the student experience**, and increase the quality and productivity of research

In summary of this section, we call into question these repeated, simplified and inaccurate statements. We argue that what is voiced as common sense HE policy for educational technology in a competitive, neoliberal global society, risks self-defeat. Staff and students are discussed, not as active, innovative global citizens universities seek to nurture, but as passive, often invisible subjects, in stale, deterministic representations. Academics such as Scott (2014) and Gibbs (2014) voiced their concerns in the media about empty phrases like ‘the student experience’ and ‘student engagement’, and our corpus linguistic analysis examples give substance to their arguments. We can cite these examples to help us resist a tendency in policy to have ‘the final word’ on topics we know are more complex ‘in the world’ (Freire & Macedo, 1987: 35), and we challenge these representations by emphasizing more performative aspects of students’ and staff experiences within higher education.

Student experience and the Californian ideology

CDA reveals that mainstream educational policy sees information and communication technologies as tools, or vehicles, for enhancing ‘the student experience’. At first glance, this one-directional view seems fairly straightforward - if scissors enhance our natural ability of cutting, and if glasses enhance our natural ability of seeing, then it seems only reasonable to expect that information and communication technologies would enhance our natural ability of learning. Therefore, it is pretty easy to imagine a well-intended policy maker who genuinely wants to improve the experience of his or her students by introducing new digital machinery. However, scissors do not make our hands stronger – they just enhance our natural ability of cutting. Glasses do not make our eyes sharper – they just enhance our natural ability of seeing. Even scissors and glasses though, in a posthumanist perspective, enact each other. Beyond an understanding of these as simple enhancements of human natural abilities, in a set of performances, these objects do not tell a singular story. For one person the scissors may perform as expected, for another they may cut themselves, or be used as an implement to injure another human. Glasses may on one person, be complimented by other people, on another person they may attract the attention of those who might criticise and bully the wearer. In the case of information and communication technologies, these have changed how we physically engage with and process information as individuals. They have radically transformed our reality, and co-evolved with humankind into the so-called network society (van Dijk, 1999; Castells, 2001). Yet like both scissors and glasses, information and communication technologies carry the history of their intended use, plus the possibilities of other performances.

Twenty years ago, Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron explored the ideological underpinnings of information and communication technologies represented in mainstream media such as the Wired magazine. In the famous essay, *The Californian Ideology* (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996), they revealed the complex past of digital computers: funded by the US military industrial complex during the Cold War, they have been developed by free-minded academics and intellectuals as technologies for freedom. Consequently, contemporary information and communication technologies have a dual nature. On the one hand, they carry an in-built legacy and ideology of the US variant of neoliberal capitalism. On the other hand, however, they enable practices which enhance individual freedom of users, such as unrestricted sharing of information. This political project is underpinned by Marshall McLuhan’s technological determinism, which interlinks digital media and capitalism. For McLuhan, says Barbrook, ‘it was the technology that made our society. It is a sort of commodity fetishism – that the power of the human being is endowed in an object. And then, the object is seen as a subject to history. So McLuhan’s theory is the one of self-expansion of the capitalist-fixed capital’. (Barbrook and Jandrić, forthcoming, 2016)

The common sense narrative of ‘using technology to enhance the student learning experience’ is closely linked to the Californian ideology in two main ways. By positioning students as passive recipients, the notion of ‘student learning experience’ builds a consumerist perspective into the process of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the notion of ‘using technology to enhance learning’ transfers human powers into information technologies (Hayes and Jandrić, 2014: 193), thus implying commodity fetishism described by Barbrook. The mainstream educational policy discourse, as it stands, clearly reflects technological determinism. In this way, we arrive to a terrain which is well-known at least from the Frankfurt School of Social Science: digital technologies, created and maintained by capitalist value-relationships, can enhance human learning only in the direction of maintaining these relationships.

However, the Californian ideology does not reflect the whole spectrum of opportunities offered by information and communication technologies. Thus, Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron ‘were strongly against the idea that global neoliberal capitalism is inherent to digital technologies’ (Barbrook and Jandrić, 2016). Therefore, mining a corpus of HE policy discourse for educational technology offers important discursive opportunities for disruption. We can confront and seek to actively replace a hegemonic common sense idea of ‘using technology

to enhance the student learning experience' with non-hegemonic alternatives. This form of resistance mines too the Californian ideology, to open room for using information technologies for creating non-capitalist futures. Such a replacement is far from simple or straightforward, and needs to be anchored in critical theory that exposes the myth of technological determinism which is politically and epistemologically interwoven through both policy and media discourse. It is impossible to divorce technologies from their origins. Information technologies are shaped according to their roots in the military industrial complex and the academy; in return, we are all shaped by information technologies. How we describe human activities with technologies across networks, is still a political choice - and the one that needs to be taken seriously. We proceed to explain how a posthumanist perspective offers one non-hegemonic alternative that supports the goals of NL. The hybrid and performative understandings of digital learning discussed in the next section, rather than sever humans from technologies, can instead help 'to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources (Goodyear, et al., 2004:1).

Posthuman opportunities for mining the crisis

Since the dawn of civilization, people have imagined creatures that blended human and non-human features. Powerful images of mythical creatures such as Centaurs (half humans, half horses), Sirens (half women, half fish), and Frankenstein (artificially created human), have excited people's imagination, and provoked discussions about what it means to be human. Three decades ago, Donna Haraway caused turmoil with the essay *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* (Haraway, 1991[1985]), which rejects rigid traditional boundaries between the living world (humans, animals) and the machines. In the network society, willingly or unwillingly, we have all become cyborgs – and this shared identity between humans and technologies has numerous implications for human learning. Based on Haraway, Katherine Hayles placed the notion of the cyborg within the wider context of the cognisphere. "No longer bound in a binary with the goddess but rather emblem and instantiation of dynamic cognitive flows between human, animal and machine, the cognisphere, like the world itself, is not binary but multiple, not a split creature but a co-evolving and densely interconnected complex system" (Hayles, 2006).

Whilst our CDA predominantly reveals simple, fixed representations of student learning through technology, what is really at play are multiple complex factors that contribute to co-evolution of the relationships between students, staff and technologies. Therefore, a 'representational' nature of these relationships, characterized within policy discourse, needs to be supplemented with a 'performative' understanding (Mol, 1993, Law, 2002, Barad, 2003). This restores human identity and labour and simultaneously reflects our human agency as inter-related with technologies – hence far from absolute. It is within this space of agency that HE policy discourse for educational technology can provide a context for mining the neoliberal agenda. Furthermore, education is dialectically intertwined with nature and society. As of recently, research on posthumanism has drifted away from the human-oriented notions such as the cyborg and the cognisphere. In this view, humankind has arrived into the new geological epoch - the Anthropocene - in which human activities have become irreversibly and dialectically interlinked with the Earth's ecosystem. In the Anthropocene, shows McKenzie Wark (2015), the tradition of critical theory belongs to rare research approaches which do not take capitalism as a naturally given thing. On that basis, he proposes seven reversals of perspective that might bring posthumanist opportunities for mining the current crisis of the Anthropocene. In the following analysis, we apply Wark's proposals to the context of the relationships between education and technologies.

The first reversal goes from bourgeois to proletarian. Higher education, and technologies, are created by the bourgeois and for the bourgeois, and they remain firmly contained within these safe and comfortable borders. However, the bourgeois common sense views of the relationships between learning and technologies make little sense for the proletariat. To advance the interests of the proletariat, makers of educational policy would need to step out of their bourgeois perspective before they can make a real change. Wark's second reversal goes from high theory to low theory. High theory is rooted in traditional continental philosophy and shaped by institutions, whilst low theory is rooted in subaltern responses to the experience of oppression. In order to develop relevant understandings of reality and adequate policy responses, low theory should stand shoulder by shoulder with high theory.

The third reversal is directed from schism to system. Instead of creating divisions between technology and learning, as implicated in the notion of 'using technology to enhance learning', makers of educational policy should embrace the unity of technology and learning. More generally, artificial borders within various natural and social phenomena should be replaced by a complex systemic approach. The fourth reversal is from molar to

molecular. By molar, Wark implies the language of policy and management; by molecular, he implies the language of labour. Too often, molar approaches characteristic of policy making, fail miserably on the molecular level – in (virtual or physical) institutions and classrooms. In order to develop critical and emancipatory education, therefore, the current balance between molar and molecular must be shifted in favour of the latter, and makers of educational policy should pay more attention to the living practices of students and staff.

The fifth reversal is from human to inhuman. Molar language of ideas is typically reserved for humans, whilst the molecular language is often (but far from exclusively) linked to machines. However, molecular (inhuman) apparatus (such as a computer) possesses some molar (human) characteristics (such as the Californian ideology), while molar (human) apparatus (such as policy documents) possess some molecular (inhuman) characteristics (such as technological determinism). Therefore, the human and the inhuman must be carefully balanced to reflect these multiple identities. The sixth reversal goes from superstructure to base. As academic labour becomes increasingly commodified and precarious, the traditional Marxist notions of superstructure and base have changed – and therefore need to be revisited. The last reversal, from genteel to vulgar, refers to differences in understanding of Marxist economy. In the age of widely available Internet, it has become increasingly popular to dismiss links between the economic base and the political and cultural superstructure. However, as social differences plummet all around the world, the vulgar relationships between income, education, and technology, remain firmly in place – for most people, access to technology enhanced education simply does not offer the road to a better life.

Based on Wark's posthumanist perspective, we analysed some opportunities for opening the hegemonic 'common sense' HE policy discourse for educational technology towards non-hegemonic and non-capitalist futures. The posthumanist perspective links knowledge with politics, and accepts a complexity of human relationships to technologies. It provides humans with agency, but this agency is bundled with technologies. However, these opportunities are restricted in two main ways. With regard to theory, there are many different understandings of posthumanism and the Anthropocene, and this research has just scratched their surface. With regard to practice, posthumanist understandings of the relationships between education and technology are much more complex than the typically straightforward common sense discourse encountered in the CDA examples, and it is questionable how they may - or may not - translate into practice. One possible development of this project would be to seek to support authentic and legitimate student-staff partnerships of discovery about ways in which digital learning is performed and to then re-write and co-write policy together, so that it is easier to apply in everyday practice (Bartholomew & Hayes, 2015).

Conclusion

Technologies have always promised enhanced opportunities for human learning. Even the simplest technologies, such as chalk and a blackboard, may enhance students' experiences – because they enrich the natural ability of the human body to communicate ideas. However humans perform their encounters with technologies of all kinds in diverse ways. Information and communication technologies are merely the latest generation in the long historical line of 'technologies for enhancement' from cave paintings, through printing press, to media of the 20th century such as radio and television. Yet still the complexity of these performances are reduced in media and policy language to reflect a dominant political economy. In this respect, the dominant discourse of higher education policy documents has some accuracy. However, as we demonstrated in our earlier work (Hayes and Jandrić, 2014), representational understandings of human relationships to technologies do so much more than merely transfer the power of the human being into a neutral technological object. Power endowed into technological objects is not neutral, as technologies are made by humans and thus reflect their hopes and wishes. Transferring agency for 'enhancing student experience' into the hands of technologies is a political activity, which internalizes the ideological constructs of technology makers. Based on Barbrook and Cameron's work on the Californian ideology (Barbrook and Cameron, 1996 [1995]), this article shows that buying into the identified dominant discursive patterns around the terms 'technology' and 'the student experience' implies buying into the dominant neoliberal ideologies. In this way, the identified HE policy discourse for educational technology creates and maintains the deeper crisis of the contemporary university.

Posthumanist perspectives on the relationships between education and human learning bring fresh opportunities for mining that crisis and also acknowledging that 'the word' and people's situated experiences of 'reading the world' (Freire & Macedo, 1987: 35) are intertwined. In the Anthropocene, it is not a question of whether technologies enhance learning – it is given that they do. However, the shift from the common sense representational view of policy texts towards a complex, hybrid performative, posthumanist view unlocks

educational usage of technologies from its techno-determinist links with neoliberal capitalism. In this way, posthumanist perspectives open the discourse for various different non-capitalist futures. They provide a point of connection for students, staff and policy makers to form partnerships to support a discursive shift from ‘using technologies to enhance student experience’ to ‘co-evolving technologies and human learning’. This is a crucial step in mining the current crisis. It is impossible to predict whether these futures would be better or worse than what we have here and now. We can though step away from the path of ‘least linguistic resistance’ (Bleiker, 2009: 5) and avoid reinforcing the techno-determinist road and eternal perpetuation of capitalism. To do so, we first need to mine hegemonic discursive relationships to embrace the complexity of relationships between human beings and technologies. We suggest that by placing posthumanist perspectives at the centre of networked learning this distinguishes our policies and practices from the simple assumptions inherent in the more dominant ‘Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL)’ approach. It offers a broader approach to knowledge, and includes in this the juncture of non-humans (as well as humans) and politics. This is necessary in order to replace a discourse of (mis)representations with a more performative view towards the digital human body, which is situated at the centre of teaching and learning.

References

- Baker, P. (2006). *Using corpora in discourse analysis*. London: Continuum.
- Barad, K. (2014). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs*, 40(1).
- Barbrook, R. & Cameron, A. (1996) [1995]. The Californian Ideology. *Science as Culture*, 6(1), 44-72.
- Barbrook, R. & Jandrić, P. (forthcoming, 2016). Dot-com capitalism in the service of cybernetic communism. In P. Jandrić, *Learning in the Age of the Digital Media*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Bartholomew, P. & Hayes, S. (2015). ‘An introduction to policy as it relates to technology enhanced learning’. In *Technology Enhanced Learning in Higher Education*. London: Libri.
- Bayne, S. (2014). What’s wrong with ‘technology enhanced learning’? In S. Bayne, C. Jones, M. de Laat & T. Ryberg (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Networked Learning 2014*, 7-9.
- Bleiker, R. (2009). *Aesthetics and World Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Castells, M. (2001). *The Internet galaxy: reflections on the Internet, business, and society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Dall’Alba, G. & Barnacle, R. (2007). An ontological turn for higher education, *Studies in Higher Education*, 32(6), 679-691.
- Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (1997). ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’. In T. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction*. London: Sage, 258 – 285.
- Ford, D. R., Porfilio, B., & Goldstein, R. A. (2015). The news media, education and the subversion of the neoliberal social imaginary. *Critical Education*, 6(7), 1-24. Retrieved from <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/186119> [Accessed 22 July 2015].
- Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). *Literacy: reading the word and the world*. New York: Praeger.
- Gibbs, G. (2014). Student engagement, the latest buzzword. Retrieved from: <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/student-engagement-the-latest-buzzword/2012947.article> [Accessed 12 July 2015].
- Haraway, D. (1985[1991]). A Cyborg Manifesto. In D. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 149-181.
- Hayes, S. & Bartholomew, P. (2015). ‘Where’s the Humanity? Challenging the Policy Discourse of Technology Enhanced Learning’. In *Technology Enhanced Learning in Higher Education*. London: Libri.
- Hayes, S. and Jandrić, P. (2014). Who is Really in Charge of Contemporary Education? People and technologies in, against and beyond the neoliberal university. *Open Review of Educational Research*, 1(1), 193-210.
- Hayles, N. K. (2006). Unfinished work from cyborg to cognisphere. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(7-8), 159-166.
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Policy Guide: National Student Survey. Retrieved from: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss/future/>
- Marx, K. (1867). *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> [Accessed 26 April 2015].
- Mol, A. (1999). Ontological politics. A word and some questions. *The Sociological Review*, 47(S1), 74-89.
- Scott, P (2014). Student experience is the new buzzword, but what does it mean? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/feb/04/university-education-not-just-about-student-experience> [Accessed 12 July 2015]
- Steeles, S. and Jones, C. (2002). *Networked Learning: Perspectives and Issues*. London: Springer.

- Thompson, G. (Ed.). (1991). *Markets, hierarchies and networks: the coordination of social life*. London: Sage.
- Van Dijk, J. (1999). *The network society: Social aspects of new media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wark, M. & Jandrić, P. (forthcoming, 2017). *New knowledge for the new planet: teacher-hackers in the Anthropocene*. In P. Jandrić, *Learning in the Age of the Digital Media*. Rotterdam: Sense.
- Wark, M. (2015). *Molecular Red: Theory for the Anthropocene*. London, New York: Verso.