Simulation, Stimulation & Silence: Learning Online and Off

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"If there are any idiots in the room, will they please stand up" said the sarcastic teacher. After a long silence, one first-year student rose to his feet.

"Now then mister, why do you consider yourself an idiot?" enquired the teacher with a sneer.

"Well, actually I don't," said the student, "but I hate to see you standing up there all by yourself."
Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants

• *Classical philosophy?* Create a game in which the philosophers debate and the learners have to pick out what each would say. *The Holocaust?* Create a simulation where students role-play the meeting at Wannsee, or one where they can experience the *true* horror of the camps, as opposed to films like *Schindler’s List.*

— Marc Prensky
Interviewee, Solot & Arluke, 1997

• “flattened rats in a jar” (interviewee), “little dead pigs lying in the sink,” “a jar of pickled animals,” or a creature simply “tossed... into a plate”

• “The initial incision ...the transforming cut and the only one made into a body that bears the obvious markers of ‘animal’... is frequently the hardest one for students to make. Even some students who had never dissected predicted that ‘opening’ the animal would be the hardest part.”
The first day, I thought I was just gonna be sick when Linda was actually slicing this pig open. I felt nauseated.... I don’t handle blood and that kind of stuff very well. I was very glad that it didn’t have blood in it. If it was a pig that had just died and had blood, I would not have been able to handle it....

(Barr & Herzog, 2000, p. 64)
• From: http://dissect.froguts.com/
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Find all the visible organs by clicking on them.
• “students cover[ed] the face of the animals they were dissecting,” with one explaining:
• Every time we’ve worked on it (the pig) the face was covered. I couldn’t cut the face. I could watch, and once the face was cut it didn’t look like a pig anymore, and I could deal with that because it looked like -you know- a scientific experiment to me. (Barr & Herzog 2000, p. 59)
• One interviewee describes what was revealed in the rat’s insides as a kind of “marvel: all of these little body parts, fitting and working neatly together like a sort of beautiful wet machine.” Barr and Herzog say they “heard comments like “God, his liver is like a mushroom or something. His heart’s kinda tough. Feel that,” and “look at that. Ooh, its got a weird texture” (2000, p. 63).
Albert Borgmann on Hyperreality

• It is: “pliable,” “brilliant,” “discontinuous and disposable”

• Pliability: objects can be “entirely subject[ed] to...desire and manipulation” (p. 88).

• “To be disposable, hyperreality must be experientially discontinuous with its context. If it were deeply rooted in its setting, it would take a laborious and protracted effort to deracinate and replace it. Reality encumbers and confines.” (p. 95-96)

Photo from: University of Montana
Borgman describes the “hyperreal” quality of brilliance, in terms of an “absence of noise” and a heightening of an object’s “attractive” features. The “truly brilliant reality,” Borgman says, “would exclude all unwanted information,” resulting in an experience in which only those aspects of explicit relevance are provided.
Gagne, Clariana; Jacobs & Dempsy, 1993

one only needs to simulate those events or characteristics that allow the learner to perform in a proficient manner when performing in the operational environment, i.e., the real world:

Simulation = (Reality) - (Task irrelevant elements).
the virtual object is *designed by someone* for *explicit* human (educational) purposes, whereas its physical counterpart *develops on its own* for purposes that are (at best) *implicit* and are not directly reducible to human ends.
Phenomenally... silence shows itself as an act that cannot be performed in radical independence. Someone must indeed act for there to be silence. But he must act in concert with someone or something which is fundamentally distinct from him. (Dauenhauer, 1980, pp. 24-25)

The “doing of silence opens me to the other,” as Dauenhauer puts it. The other,” in this context, “needs my yielding to reach me” (1973, p. 28).
Zembylas and Michaelides

• The most valuable contribution teachers and students might be able to make is keeping open the possibility for questioning silences in the classroom and, even more important, for responding in silence. This suggests a pedagogy that is no longer informed simply by knowledge, but by ignorance, unknowability, and the inexpressible. There is definitely a risk involved in this effort, both for students and teachers, because it is sometimes difficult to interpret silences in public spaces; yet it may be a worthwhile risk to take.
References, Credits

Waldenfels, B. 2007. The Question of the Other, Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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by how common e-learning technologies open up limited, experiential spaces for users, similar to how storylines opened up by works of fiction. However, digital worlds are markedly different from the "real" world of objects and embodied relations. This book makes an exemplary book—well-crafted, diligent, and substantial. He makes his case with colorful descriptions of experiences with information technology. There is clearly a need for the commanding presence of the surprising, and for unfathomable things, as Van Manen describes so well. In this context, he shows impressively the ambivalent potentialities of digital education.

—ALBERT BORGMAAN, Regents Professor of Philosophy, University of Montana

This text is destined for readers interested in the quality of the online student experience, human interaction, and the possibilities and also the limitations presented by online technologies.

—MAX VAN MANEN, Professor Emeritus, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

Van Manen convincingly demonstrates how a phenomenological perspective offers practical and experiential differences between digital learning and traditional face-to-face, classroom interaction. He censures nor extols virtual learning technologies. Rather, by identifying weaknesses and strengths, he points to ways in which digital learning might provide educational experience that complements the conventional student-teacher, instructor and learner relationship.

—DAVID SEAMON, Professor, Kansas State University

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The Place of the Classroom and the Space of the Screen

Relational Pedagogy and Internet Technology

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