

Teaching in the New (Video) Vernacular

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Thank you for the opportunity to visit with you today. I'd like to make six points to reinforce and supplement what my colleague Mark Phillipson has said and to sort of help us outline what might be a useful research and action agenda.

1. Television production is now and will be for some time to come the central mode of communication of our time. In *The Social Life of Information*, the classic study by John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid, television is mentioned only once, and that in a brief discussion of advertising, even though more people received their information from television in 2000 (the year that book was published) than from any other medium.¹

Television, or what today might better be called the medium formerly known as television, is *still* the most important mode of communication. It's the reason why the only blood shed in the so-called bloodless revolutions on the European continent in 1989, 1990, and 1991 was shed in battles for control over the television towers in Bucharest, Vilnius, and Moscow, and it's the reason why over \$300 billion, or about \$1 billion a day, is spent in advertising in this country alone to put brands and messages over and between moving images on our screens. You all may have heard that the average American home now has more television sets than people....

The importance of this visual medium is why lawyer, Stanford faculty member, and social activist Larry Lessig—a man who has argued cases before the Supreme Court, and who likes to get in front of things—declared at Wikimania in Boston in August that text—text, around which we were raised and which we communicate in (for the most part)—that text is...dead, that the written word has become “the ‘Latin’ of our modern times”; that the ordinary language, the “vulgar” or vernacular language, the new language of the street is video and sound; and, most important, that the tools of creativity (what

¹ John Seeley Brown and Paul Duguid, *The Social Life of Information* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000).

Mark has demonstrated today) are in fact what Lessig calls new and fundamentally essential “tools of speech.”²

Lord Puttnam—David Puttnam—the great filmmaker who made “Chariots of Fire” and “Gandhi,” and who is now the government face of moving-image culture in the UK, where, incidentally, there is a new JISC “strategic e-content alliance” has been established that could serve as a model for many of us (it includes as members the British Library, the BBC, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, the NHS National Electronic Library for Health, and others) (see: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/aboutus/committees/working_groups/strategic_econtent_alliance.aspx), has asserted that the concept of “media literacy”—skills centered equally around text and images and sound and moving images—is about “empowering people by providing them with material which may enhance their cultural awareness, their critical faculty and their creative skills—or maybe all these and more....” This is why the British government today says in research reports and policy statements variations of the following statement (and I quote): “[t]o be educated today, to understand ourselves, our education sector needs the moving image medium at its command.”³

2. Television production, or production of the medium formerly known as television is not the only locus where students, the public, and faculty can engage the moving image medium. Archives also abound. Next week the head of CNI, Cliff Lynch, will be attending a meeting in London called the Memories for Life Colloquium. It is co-sponsored by Tim Berners-Lee’s new Web Research Initiative at MIT, the British Library, and the British Computer Society. It’s an extraordinary meeting about the social and technological dimensions of memory and record keeping—but some of the key speakers will be from the BBC and British television. “The Future of Our Pasts” is the meeting subtitle. The French National Audiovisual Institute in Paris, the French version of our National Archives for moving images and recorded sound, carries a similar title: “Creating the future of your past.” For who controls our audiovisual archive, really does controls the future of our past. And it is because of the significance of that, the audiovisual archive, that so much care, and so many millions of dollars (over \$250 million) are heading into the construction of our Library of Congress’s National Audiovisual Conservation Center in Culpeper, Virginia, opening next year and to the

² Lessig is founder of Creative Commons. See: <http://mirror4.video.blip.tv/Raines-LarryLessigAtWikimania2006723.mov>

³ See: “The Creative Archive: Speech by Lord Puttnam of Queensgate, CBE,” London, September 13, 2006, available at: http://creativearchive.bbc.co.uk/news/archives/2006/10/lord_puttnam_ad.html; “Digitisation in the UK and the Case for a National Framework,” quoting the 2006 Loughborough University study on “Digitised Content in the UK Research Libraries and Archives Sector” (also known as the Loughborough study, available at: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/publications/pub_digi_uk.aspx); and Jeff Hulbert, Luke McKernan, and Murray Weston, “BUFVC/ITN Archive Scoping Study Final Report” (London: British Universities Film & Video Council, November 2003), p. 4.

public in 2008. At over 1 million moving image collection items, including theatrical films and newsreels, television programs, educational, industrial, and advertising material; nearly 3 million audio collection items: commercial sound recordings, radio broadcasts, and voice recordings of historical figures; and over 1.7 million supporting documents, screenplays, manuscripts, photographs, and press kits, it is essentially our national memory of the 20th century—encased in metal compounds. And it's for that reason, as my colleague Jeff Ubois has taken great care in pointing out in his most recent article in the *Journal of Digital Information*, and as you know from issues about whether YouTube can show us our own soldiers getting killed or getting buried, we need to gain control over how to use these resources before they are destroyed, denied, or both.⁴

3. Together, moving image assets that come to us—and I want to include in this recorded sound as well—together, moving images that come to us on screen, and moving images that are archived in metal vaults in Virginia, or on servers run by Brewster Kahle at the Presidio, or on your personal hard drives or at YouTube, or in the BitTorrent and Gnutella protocols, define in the 21st century what philosopher Jurgen Habermas calls the public sphere, and because we are participants in creating the public sphere⁵ (indeed, CNI members are at the vanguard of this), we have to get with the program and orient or reorient our thinking to put video front and center on the modern research agenda and action plan. As Mark told you, more than half of the teenagers in America today create media and post it on the web beyond text-based e-mail. IBM's engineers have calculated that “humanity will generate more data—from websites to digital photos and video” in the next three years than it has generated in the previous 1,000.⁶ So to pick up the teaching and learning thread, what does this mean in practice?

4. Three answers. The first is, we have to encourage experimentation, in the academy, in the library specifically, in scholarly publishing (which itself is being redefined), in the museum--in short, everywhere--involving video. The media theoretician Lev Manovich, a man whose book was thrust in my hand the moment I walked into our Center in July, has written that today, there is a need for more “rational”

⁴ See Jeff Ubois, “Finding Murphy Brown: How Accessible Are Television Broadcasts?” *Journal of Digital Information* 7, No. 2 (2006), at <http://journals.tdl.org/jodi/article/viewArticle/jodi-177/0> (and the review by Larry Lessig at: <http://www.lessig.org/blog/archives/003572.shtml>); and Edward Wyatt, “Now on YouTube: Iraq Videos of U.S. Troops under Attack,” *New York Times*, October 6, 2006.

⁵ See especially Jurgen Habermas, “Political Communication in Media Society,” speech delivered at the International Communication Association, Dresden, June 20, 2006, available at http://www.habermasforum.dk/index.php?type=onlinetexts&text_id=342.

⁶ Pew study; see also David Talbot, “The Fading Memory of the State,” *Technology Review*, July 2005; Kevin Kelly, “We Are the Web,” *Wired*, August 2005; and Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005).

experimentation on the order of what Bauhaus and the Russian constructivist media avant-garde conducted with the new media of their time—photography, film, new print technologies, telephony—back in the 1920s. It's sort of our contention that Manovich's calls for "systematic, laboratory-like research" into new media elements and "basic compositional, expressive, and generative [add also production] strategies" deserve an answer.⁷

So, here's one shining example. In the United Kingdom, the British government and JISC in particular are digitizing explicitly for teaching, learning, and research 3,000 hours of television news and cinema newsreels from the ITN Reuters Archive. It's one of the most exciting resources that can be offered to education. No archive or data set of moving images compares for helping education meet its moving-image needs. Newsfilm Online features downloadable moving image content under licensing schemes allowing users to edit material to suit their own purposes. These resources are being encoded simultaneously as Windows Media, Apple QuickTime, and MPEG-2 files, supported by an extensive—and easily searchable—database and supplemented by 450,000 pages of newsfilm bulletin scripts. All with the explicit goal (and I quote) of "mak[ing] the use of newsfilm as easy and intuitive as it is for the written word."⁸

But there are other models. This Friday, the director of our Center and I are traveling up to WGBH to explore an educational venture with WGBH to bring back into educational use the 13-hour series "Vietnam: A Television History," which many of you may remember from the 1980s as a most extraordinary chronicle on television and through Stanley Karnow's companion book of another calamitous war in which we were engaged. The WGBH Archive owns the rights to the material in 85 storage cartons, containing the original series plus 280,000 feet of 16-mm film and corresponding sound track outtakes of original material shot over six years by the project in the United States and around the world, and 228,000 feet of 16-mm film and corresponding sound—stock footage from 65 sources worldwide.⁹ The opportunity now exists to digitize, describe, and deploy these assets in purposeful ways for student understanding in history, international affairs, journalism, law, political science, and psychology, among other fields. Imagine such a partnership between such a public media archive and a university, or consortium of universities.

Judy Thomas, who is here today, directs the Robertson Media Lab at the University of Virginia. I'm fortunate to be able to be working with her and her wisdom on a project

⁷ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 15, 30. The Russian constructivists particularly appreciated what Manovich calls "factory logic" when working with their new media. See also Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005).

⁸ See: <http://newsfilm.bufvc.ac.uk/>

⁹ See: <http://www.lib.umb.edu/archives/wgbh.html>

funded by private and public monies to describe the history of the American South in the 20th century largely through video and sound. This is a live production going on right now that is intentionally, purposefully shooting assets—hundreds of hours—that can be made useful in the classroom, that can be made useful in the digital library, that takes the entire world of education as, in effect, our DVD for which to produce extras. Here’s a 51-second clip that you could imagine using in the classroom

[CLIP]

As Judy has written in a background paper for the project, “*The South* presents interesting challenges to the library in terms of collaborating with content producers in the creation and collection of rich media resources. The project demands that the library no longer play a static custodial role, accepting ready-made, complete collections, but rather an active participatory role, fully engaging in the process of content creation. Issues affecting the actual collection of the content must be resolved at the point of production and must inform technical and workflow decisions from the outset.”¹⁰ Imagine producers working together with education and cultural institutions to create such material on demand, as it were.

Then, there is Harlem. Our Center, which has many reasons for studying and celebrating the importance of Harlem for America and the world, is creating the Harlem Digital Archive, which is a new collaboration of the university, the community, and the wider world (including producers and museums and private enterprises) in creating for teaching learning and research—a vast, usable repository of assets and information about the vibrant history of Harlem. There is a short film we have made at the Center which we have made available for you online.¹¹

5. The second is, recognize—all of us—that we are, in fact, all engaged in the public sphere, and specifically in what Yochai Benkler, the Yale professor of law and author of *The Wealth of Networks* calls a “battle over the institutional ecology of the digital environment.” The regimes—legal, technological, financial—that govern modern communications in the digital age are changing, and as the magisterial study from Harvard’s Berkman Center has put it, we have to be engaged across the board on the front lines of activism to widen use rights for educational media.¹²

¹⁰ See: Kimberly Tryka and Judith Thomas, “‘The South’: Bringing Production Footage into the Digital Library” (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library, November 2006), at: <http://www.thesouth.tv>

¹¹ See: <http://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/harlemarchive/>

¹² See Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), and William W. Fisher and William McGeeveran, “The Digital Learning Challenge: Obstacles to Educational Uses of Copyrighted Material in the Digital Age,” (Cambridge: Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard Law School, August 2006), at: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/media/files/copyrightandeducation.html>

6. Third and finally, we need to develop a set of best practices for video and educational video in particular, something our project, supported by the Hewlett Foundation, is engaged in today. We can learn from print culture and its recent experiences, so that 50 or 100 years from now, the universe of university presses that will exist, based equally on video as on text, will not be condemned as inadequate or worse, so that mass digitization or whatever follows it, will not be met with howls and teeth gnashing in the wilderness, and so that producers, broadcasters, librarians, and educators recognize themselves, much as the members of the strategic e-content alliance recognize, as all unified under the mission of education.

In closing, the question arises, will anybody care? If we build it, will anybody come? When I was an undergraduate over 20 years ago, I had the opportunity to study the history of American foreign policy under historian Walter LaFeber. LaFeber recently gave his retirement address. He was booked to give it at the Cornell Club in New York. But as over 3,000 RSVPs rolled in, Cornell was obliged to book the Beacon Theater, and LaFeber gave his last lecture to a crowd as big as the Rolling Stones got last month.¹³

The market for nonfiction is huge, the demand for it is unrelenting, and I think we all have to think of the best ways today, of feeding this monster. We invite you to visit us at work at the Center, and those of you who are interested in attending our big conference on educational video this spring, please, let us know. Thank you.

¹³ Video of the lecture is online at: <http://www.alumni.cornell.edu/lafeber/>.