

CONVERGENCE AND CONTEST: HUMANISM, COMIC BOOKS, AND HIGHER
EDUCATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

by

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Convergence and Contest: Humanism, Comic Books, and Higher Education in the Digital Age
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Convergence and Contest breaks down the rhetoric of crisis facing contemporary higher education into two paths, narratives of nostalgia and progress, exposing a shared anxiety about technology, legacy, and value in time. I argue that continuity, as opposed to disruption, describes the relationship between institutions of higher learning and innovations in technology by making visible the layers of mediation that link people and the objects they study and teach in the lineage of humanist inquiry. Higher education might look to its own institutional history and the practices of knowledge-making that have defined it for guidance in crisis. *Convergence and Contest* does this, adopting as case studies three technological objects: the fifteenth-century printed book, the contemporary comic book, and the online digital learning platform. Each of these is a site of convergence in time and contestation of cultural value that defines humanist knowledge. Humanism is a mode of encounter between people, ideas, and technologies, a claim *Convergence and Contest* proves through exploration of cultural objects as diverse as William Caxton's 1485 edition of Thomas Malory, an obscure one page comic strip, and the discussion forums of the 2014 MOOC "Comic Books and Graphic Novels." In outlining this humanism for the digital age, this dissertation traces mediation through registers of transcendent literary continuity and the material networks of people and texts in lived social space. I read through the logic of the book – as well as the contested boundary of the screen – to discover the shared lineage of technology as a shaping agent for the production and dissemination of higher learning. Recognizing the continuity of mediation in the history of higher education and the technologies upon which it relies can meaningfully direct colleges and universities through the challenges of the digital age.

DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Two distinct narratives frame higher education's response to technological change: nostalgia and progress. Both rely on a *then* – either past or future – and a *now*. The perceived divisions that structure colleges and universities, especially highly visible and prestigious public and private research institutions, dramatize these narratives: humanist and engineer, faculty and administrator, classroom teacher and technology support staff. These binaries suggest divergent interests and thus irreconcilable visions of the future of higher learning. But I argue that both nostalgia and progress, and the broader rhetoric of crisis to which they contribute, rely on a shared anxiety about how people, ideas, and the objects that contain them move through time. Whether illuminated manuscript or digital learning management system, higher learning has always been premised on mediation between teachers, students, and the objects they use to make the world more knowable. While quite distinct in their particulars, each of the technologies I examine in this dissertation – vernacular printed books, comic books and graphic novels, and digital learning platforms – make this process of mediation *in* and *through* time a “visible dimension” in space, to borrow a phrase from James Gleick's *Time Travel: A History*.¹ They become repositories for uncertainties about legacy and value in higher education. Nostalgia erases the lineage of technology in time. Progress sanctifies it. Recognizing the continuity of technological mediation in the history of higher learning can meaningfully direct colleges and universities through the challenges of the digital age.²

¹ James Gleick, *Time Travel: A History* (New York: Pantheon, 2016), 13.

² By “technological mediation” I mean the intervention of artisanal, mechanical, architectural, and digital artifacts or platforms in transactions of knowledge making. Mediation is both an acknowledgement of separation and an expression of intersection. I follow the work of Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, who argue that mediation “*becomes a key trope for understanding and articulating our being in, and becoming with, the technological world, our emergence and ways of intra-acting with it, as well as the acts and processes of temporality stabilizing the world*”

When innovative teaching practices and emergent educational platforms intersect with vectors of traditional academic value, they produce friction. Institutions of higher education are complex systems that respond to change more slowly than the technology sector.³ This temporal mismatch feeds a sense of disruption, that the new encroaches on the space of the old with an eye toward replacing it. But disruption distorts the relationship between learning and technology: innovation and emergence have shaped the practices of teaching and learning at institutions of higher education throughout their long history. The new does not efface the past so much as make more visible the bonds connecting the ongoing enterprise of learning to it. It is true that narratives of nostalgia and progress operate in distinct temporal registers, the former mythic and the latter revolutionary. But across the pages of books and through the digital screen, mediation calls attention to the continuity that links minds and ideas to the material networks of people and objects that make them real in time. Encounters between people and technology facilitate the ongoing production and dissemination of knowledge privileged in classrooms and across campuses. The stories we tell about the future of higher education should reflect this continuity instead of getting sidetracked by disruption. My thesis in this dissertation is that technological mediation, rather than causing the separation of nostalgia and progress, synthesizes these modes of thinking in and through time.

into media, agents, relations, and networks” (emphasis in original). Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), xv.

³ Rates of change are not universal across higher education, by any means. My argument targets those colleges and universities that emblemize the lineage of higher learning: elite residential liberal arts colleges and large public or private research institutions. Some sectors, like smaller public universities, community colleges, and for-profit universities, have been faster to adapt to technological change in response to the needs of their students, many of whom require distance and online education options to complete their degree programs.

I came to the thesis of this dissertation by unexpected means: studying comic books and graphic novels. Beginning its life as an exploration of the shifts in cultural capital that mark an emerging academic acceptance of comics, this project evolved to take aim at the larger patterns of value and mediation that shape contemporary higher education. Comic books are emblematic of the historical interface of vernacular cultural production and emergent media technologies. They narrate the very negotiations of capital, continuity, and innovation in the production and dissemination of art that have shaped humanist inquiry through its historical arc. Comics and graphic novels expose the intersection of transcendence *across* time and material networks of readers and texts *in* time. They teach an important lesson: the imaginative space of the book has always built relationships with readers by balancing the lineage of the past with mediation in the present. Comics and graphic novels are a living vernacular, generating energetic exchange between legacy, nostalgia, and the changing needs of the present. This dissertation speaks their language in communicating the need for educators and administrators in higher education to more thoughtfully reflect on their relationship to technology in the digital age.

I take up comic books in more detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, but I present here an emblematic example of their instructive potential. “Inferno Joe,” a one page comic strip by Robert Sikoryak published in *RAW* magazine in 1989 (Fig. 0.1), exemplifies the capacity of comic books and graphic novels to inscribe the past in present acts of technological mediation.⁴ Its premise is simple. Each panel looks like the comic strip inside a “Bazooka Joe” gum wrapper, each of which represents a different level of hell corresponding to Dante Alighieri’s fourteenth-century Italian poem the *Commedia*. Bazooka Joe plays the role of Dante the pilgrim, his companion Mort that of Virgil the guide. “Inferno Joe” relies on irony: the major figure in

⁴ Robert Sikoryak, “Inferno Joe,” in *RAW* 2, no. 1, ed. Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly (New York: Penguin, 1989), 58.

Western literature between Homer and Shakespeare traverses the centuries to be rendered, literally, garbage. It is a joke about continuity and discontinuity, about the pathways of memory across which art accrues and sheds cultural capital. By expressing the accrued literary authority of Dante in a medium defined by its lack of permanence and dearth of respect, “Inferno Joe” forces readers into limbo between seemingly incompatible art worlds. It complicates this space by making visible the obscured populist energies of the *Commedia* – the poem’s conscious interfacing of past literary authority and present vernacular innovation – and by acknowledging the growing cultural ambitions of comics. “Inferno Joe” manifests a tension between high and low value in dual expressions of recent and remote literary history. In using it to introduce this dissertation, I aim not to elevate the status of the comic by highlighting the source material, nor to use the medium of Sikoryak’s strip to vulgarize the literary tradition of Dante. Instead I claim “Inferno Joe” as emblematic of the intersection of time and value that conditions our reception of mediation as readers and as educators. Both Dante and Sikoryak find the literary authority of the past in the shifting dynamics of capital in the present. As a site of convergence in time and contestation of value, the comics medium expresses itself within this historical play of innovation and mediation.

“Inferno Joe” overhauls conventional binaries of time and value in two ways. First, it compresses temporal experience such that the reader can be both in the past and in the present at once. Second, it disrupts the mapping of value onto the established – at the expense of the emergent – by blurring the distinction between handcrafted art and mass produced commodity. The former complication is temporal as well as linguistic. Dante’s *Commedia*, written in Italian, challenged the classical literary authority of written Latin. Dante’s words framed an encounter between classical past and contemporary readership, suspending in tension a transcendent

continuity of literary authority stretching back to the classical period with the emergent material networks of vernacular readers. The *Commedia* interpolates literary authority, but for contemporary readers the populism that defined its historical moment of production operates below the level of its now-established canonicity. Just as the play of the poem's language and genre draws readers back through time, readers draw it forward by reproducing it in acts of reading, teaching, translating, and publishing. Movement across time drives perception of the poem's value. The *Commedia* ruptures tradition by animating the classical past in the fourteenth century *and* grounds our contemporary claims to literary authority through the accumulated weight of its own lineage. "Inferno Joe" dramatizes these effects on the comics page, relying on differences in style and dispersal in time to land its joke, in so doing expressing a powerful continuity in literary history.

The second complication of "Inferno Joe" is its resistance to traditional distributions of value in the literary marketplace. "Inferno Joe" is at once ten separate Bazooka Joe wrappers and a comic book page consisting of ten panels. It is a handcrafted work of art *and* its own mechanical reproduction. Such tensions between authenticity and artifice define the history of comics. And though it trades on the vulgarity of Bazooka Joe as well as the artistic pretensions of found-object collage, "Inferno Joe" is neither. It is a printed page in the avant-garde anthology *RAW* which, since its first publication in 1980, has showcased auteur highbrow cartooning. *RAW* traces closely the path of the modernists almost a century earlier – avant-garde artists and poets leveraging experimentation into critical and eventually commercial acceptance. *RAW* Vol. 2 No. 1, in which "Inferno Joe" was published, was the first of the magazine's issues to be published in trade paperback format, meaning that it was bound as a book rather than folded and stapled as a typical magazine or pamphlet would be. This material shift facilitated *RAW*'s movement from

the magazine rack to bookshelf, marking an important shift in the cultural capital of comics and graphic storytelling. “Inferno Joe” narrates both the attack comics levels against established canon and, paradoxically, the ascent of comics on the cultural ladder toward acceptance and eventually canonization. Past authority and present vulgarity encounter each other on the page not as disruption but as continuity. The comics vernacular marks relationships in time as measures of affinity rather than distinction or legitimation. Comic books and graphic novels teach that technology, mediation, and the dynamics of cultural capital are not mutually exclusive endeavors in the pursuit of meaningful knowledge.

Sikoryak’s play of histories depends on juggling continuity and disruption. In assuming its fragmented form, “Inferno Joe” is a continuation of the long tradition of Bazooka Joe comics and the cheap printing of mass art. In its commitment to parody and farce, it is a continuation of the underground comix that opened a space for alternative voices in the 1960s and paved the way for publications like *RAW*. In its literary ambitions, it is an extension of Dante’s sophisticated and subtle vernacularity. Resisting categorization and circumscription, comics reveals its insurgency, rising from the grease and grime of the print house to transgress regimes of value and weaken boundaries of time. “Inferno Joe” speaks in a register apart from discernment or judgment. This single page exposes the humanist heart of comics: a series of mediations between ideas, the objects that produce and contain them, and the readers who interact with them in time. Comic books and graphic novels hold together the transcendent continuity of literary history and the networks of popular culture that organize and disseminate it.

“Inferno Joe” closes in the icy center of hell, as does Dante’s poem. And it closes with perhaps the worst joke of the bunch: Mort announces to Joe “there’s the king of evil – the one called Dis!” to which Joe responds “well, ‘dis’ must be the end!” The irony is thick: Sikoryak’s

work, especially a page like “Inferno Joe,” does not mark any sort of end at all, but a provocative beginning. “Dis” is a story about how comics renovates value as it defines literary artifacts and their institutional relationships in time. “Inferno Joe” confronts its readers with literary objects continually accruing and shedding value. These panels find humor in the weight of Dante, turning his premise into a joke, and in so doing invoking the very vernacular energy Dante himself exemplifies. The lineage of “Inferno Joe” extends much further back than a popular bubble gum brand, or even the modern history of comics. It traces the contours of the distant literary past, allowing its pulp legacy to penetrate the canon and in so doing interrogate the canon’s very constitution. In the shadow of this ancestry, comics art brokers a fresh encounter between history and the reader on the page, suspending the linearity of authority with the recombinatorial potential of cultural production in the participatory digital age. “Inferno Joe” directs our attention to the material transactions of art through time, the reality of technological mediation as a vehicle for cultural value. This page, and comics art by extension, teaches humanists to read time digitally in discrete combinations of old and new, high and low. The modern history of comics, defined by this tense relationship between continuity and disruption, reveals the role technological mediation plays in higher education’s own temporal crisis moment.

“Inferno Joe” manipulates Dante, comics, and the lineage of vernacular art, emblemizing the vectors of time and value that define the central subject of this dissertation: humanism. Various applied, humanism is a word “whose range of possible uses runs from the pedantically exact to the cosmically vague,” as Tony Davies puts it in *Humanism*.⁵ In trying to thread the space between, humanism means three things in this dissertation. First, and most important, a mode of interaction between people, ideas, and the technological objects that

⁵ Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London: Routledge, 1997), 3.

contain them along vectors of time and cultural value. Second, the pivot point of a perceived distinction between the liberal arts and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). And third, a methodological approach at times embraced and at times rejected in the timeline of the academic humanities (disciplines including languages, literatures, history, and philosophy). I argue first and foremost for humanism as a mode of interaction because time and value and the pressure they exert on cultural production condition its operation as both a categorical distinction and a methodology. Through humanism, institutions of higher education might recognize the continuities of concept, materiality, and technology embedded in their own lineage. To do so, I remind humanism to its etymological inheritance, growing from the Latin *humus* (earth, soil) and *humanus* (human, earthy). From there, it traverses the physical world through the *studia humanitatis*, the production of knowledge about humanity, culture, and human civilization (as opposed to the *studia divinitatis*). During the modern history of higher education, humanism has lost much of its rootedness in the mediations of materiality and technology by virtue of its being pitted against the so-called “hard” disciplines. Thus, while I acknowledge humanism as a categorical principle deployed in the organization of higher learning, I am primarily interested in its work as a mode of encountering time and cultural value through technological mediation.

Humanism’s lexical roots draw it back to classical Rome, even as its institutional history is more modern, dating to the early nineteenth century and the German educational reformers who envisioned research institutions that provided the framework for the modern American university.⁶ In the middle of this timeline falls the Middle Ages and the European Renaissance,

⁶ Two in particular: the reformer and theologian Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, whose 1808 essay *The Dispute between Philanthropinism and Humanism in the Educational Theory of our Time* introduced *humanismus*, a return to education grounded in the classics, civics, and personal

centuries which saw the Roman *studia humanitatis* manifested in the organization of the seven liberal arts. This system – comprised of the *trivium* of grammar, logic, and rhetoric and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy – formed the ground of human physical and cultural knowledge that led to advanced study in subjects pertaining to the divine. The Renaissance *umanisti*, educators invested in reinvigorating the *studia humanitatis* in late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, sought out, translated, and published the knowledge of classical antiquity. For the *umanisti*, the liberal arts represented a powerful continuity with Hellenic and Roman culture, rooted in mechanisms of textual excavation and renovation. The work of the early European humanists developed a mode of thinking about human culture and the physical world as a series of interlocking disciplines and domains of inquiry we might call liberal education. Colleges and universities still find themselves indebted to this legacy.

For William Caxton (c.1422 – c.1492), an English printer and publisher, the *studia humanitatis* and its inscription in material texts are inextricable. In the prologue to his 1481 English edition of French cleric Gossuin of Metz's *The Mirroure of the World*, a compendium of late medieval knowledge, Caxton writes that “confideryng that wordes ben periffhyng / vayne / & forgetful / and writynges duelle & abide permanêt,” the learning of ancient men must be “fette by declaracion in fair and Aourned volumes / to thende that fcience and Artes lerned and founden of

growth as a counterpart to the practical and utilitarian educational philosophy of *philanthropinismus*; and Wilhelm von Humboldt, another reformer, whose 1810 essay “On the Internal and External Organization of the Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin” developed the model of the modern research university, built on a nationalism grown by Niethammer's *humanismus*. See Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer, *Der Streit des Philanthropinismus und Humanismus in der Theorie des Erziehungs-Unterrichts unsrer Zeit* (Jena: Bei Friedrich Frommann, 1808); Wilhelm von Humboldt, “On the Internal and External Organization of Higher Scientific Institutions in Berlin,” *German History in Documents and Images*, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3642.

things paffed myght be had in perpetuel memorye and remembraunce.” (sig. a4^r).⁷ The modern liberal arts – transacted in colleges and universities, in academic departments, and in classrooms of all kinds – rely on the confluence of intellectual, material, and technological histories represented by Caxton’s “fair and Aourned volumes,” even if they do not always acknowledge their debts. Caxton and the Renaissance *umanisti* used texts to overcome the limits of time that separated the classical past from the modern present, creating a vernacular literary culture that took advantage of the emerging technologies of print to accomplish its goals. This maneuver lies at the heart of the liberal arts and by extension the institutions of higher education that grew around them. Access to the knowledge of the past and the capacity to shape knowledge in the future was, and today remains, rooted in layers of material and technological mediation, in the “perpetual memorye” of books.

As inflected by scholar-practitioners like Caxton, humanism acts as a vehicle for the enduring investigations of human culture and the physical world. As institutionalized in the modern university, humanism comes to define the approach to inquiry engaged by the loose confederation of academic disciplines we now call the humanities. This balance of reflection and material instantiation recalls Geoffrey Galt Harpham’s definition of the humanities in a recent collection of essays titled *The Humanities and the Dream of America*: “*the scholarly study of documents and artifacts produced by human beings in the past enables us to see the world from different points of view so that we may better understand ourselves.*”⁸ Harpham keeps his attention trained on practice, more than abstract definition – the study of material things leads to understanding of our transcendent selves. While Harpham’s definition remains oriented toward

⁷ Gossuin of Metz, *The Mirrour of the World*. Westminster, 1481. STC 24762. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. EEBO.

⁸ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 5-6. Emphasis in original.

“*documents and artifacts*,” for much of its history the humanities has cleaved more toward relationships of transcendent continuity than ones of material network. What began as an expression of humanity’s debt to the *humus* has developed through institutionalization and canonization into a marker of transcendent value, the cultivation of the difficult-to-define “whole person.” The earthy and human came to be understood in immaterial terms. This has resulted in abstracting the operations of humanism, disconnecting it from the material and technical histories of cultural production and leaving it in search of a local habitation in the digital age. In Harpham’s intersections of materiality and reflection and Caxton’s “fair and Aoured volumes,” this dissertation draws humanism back down into the *humus*.

Humanism remains the umbrella under which institutions of higher education negotiate their relationship to time and value. This dissertation may not be able to stably define humanism, but it can reorient it to the material networks and technological innovations which continually transact its historical project. As I understand it, the work of humanists both early and late has always been indebted to the materiality of *humanitas*, to the layers of mechanical and technological mediation that substantiate human thought and art in time. As such, a humanism of the digital age must account for the changing interfaces and archives of human knowledge and engagement. It cannot remain a stand-in for the sanctity of traditional practices of teaching and learning. While it has labored to “articulate all the major themes of the continuously unfolding revolution of modernity” as Davies puts it, what makes humanism continually vital as a mode of relation to the world is not so much its content or subject matter but the vectors of time and value that underlie its influence on our approaches to education and culture.⁹ As Ciriaco Morón Arroyo suggests in *The Humanities in the Age of Technology*, the humanities must resist the urge to be

⁹ Davies, *Humanism*, 5.

“a bulwark against science and technology” and instead engage in the “search for the ground in which science and technology gain their meaning.”¹⁰ In the convergence of person, idea, and technology, I find the DNA of humanism. Along with it, the foundation for higher education’s mandate in the digital age.

Out of my meditations on comic books and humanism, the premise of this dissertation emerges: the effacement of technological mediation from the history of cultural knowledge production conditions the transactions of capital through which objects, ideas, and practices enter or are rejected from the rarified space of academic legitimation. This applies to subjects of inquiry (i.e. novels, poems, comic books, etc.), but also – importantly – to the pedagogical practices and strategies used to engage them. In reading the transactions of cultural capital in the practices of teaching and learning and not just what is taught and learned, I extend the work of John Guillory, whose *Cultural Capital* argues that the canon of great literary works was not forged by the inherent value of texts, but by the institutionalized choices made by teachers in their classrooms and on their reading lists. Guillory resists the transcendental canon in favor of “what does have a concrete location as a list”: the syllabus.¹¹ Building on Guillory, I understand cultural capital not merely as value traded by institutions, people, and markets but as a conditioning factor in the historical life of things and their use in the making of knowledge. Education innovations that rely on technological mediation are marked low, in contrast to the high value of established practices like the traditional lecture and the seminar. From this environment emerge narratives of nostalgia and narratives of progress, both of which fail to recognize the scope of mediation in the history of knowledge production, organization, and

¹⁰ Ciriaco Morón Arroyo, *The Humanities in the Age of Technology* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 252.

¹¹ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 30.

dissemination in higher education. Instead of continuity, both narratives posit technology as an agent of disruption between people and art, teacher and student, user and interface, institution and consumer. At its core, my argument recognizes in narratives of both lament and vision, in cultural objects both consecrated and insurgent, and in practices both established and emergent, a shared history of technological mediation as a means of making sense of culture.

I support my thesis through three claims threaded through each of the chapters in this dissertation. First, the conditioning effects of technological mediation on academic knowledge have been effaced in histories of the enterprise. Second, that humanism operates in both transcendent and material registers. And third, that the canon of teaching practices, like the canon of texts, is formed by negotiations of cultural capital. In the first case, from the paper and ink of the printed book to the ubiquitous walls, doors, desks, and blackboards of the classroom to the cutting-edge digital platforms of learning at massive scale, the history of educational encounters is negotiated between media, understood to both traverse time and define discrete moments. Ideas are associated with the former, things relegated to the latter. Such tension between the idea and the thing itself is not new to histories of inquiry in higher education. Take, for instance, Ernst Cassirer's 1961 collection *The Logic of the Humanities*. Cassirer recognizes that knowledge in the humanities faces a choice between idea and thing: knowledge can "orient itself toward the real, but in this case it can never completely penetrate its object," describing it "only piecemeal and empirically, with respect to particular properties and characteristics."¹² Or, knowledge "can achieve complete insight, an adequate idea, which constitutes the nature and essence of the object," the result of which being that "knowledge never leaves the sphere of its

¹² Ernst Cassirer, *The Logic of the Humanities*, trans. Clarence Smith Howe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 53.

own concept formation.”¹³ Inquiry in this formulation remains suspended between the lecture and the book. But Cassirer’s binary of idea and thing effaces the role technological mediation plays in facilitating the transmission of ideas through people and across time. In this I follow the work of William Kuskin, who argues in *Recursive Origins* that “literary reading is a way of traveling successfully in time that is in no way diminished by changes in technology.”¹⁴ Knowledge of the past and knowledge in the present are not bounded by their separation in time but rather drawn into a relationship of continuity through the material histories of technological objects. In technological mediation, higher learning finds not just the future but its own past, a discovery indicative of the “enfoldings – past nestling inside present, present carrying the embryo of the future” which “constitute the complex temporalities that inhabit technics,” as N. Katherine Hayles puts it in *How We Think*.¹⁵ This dissertation confronts rhetorical formations of higher learning as either narratives of nostalgia or narratives of progress by exposing the shared anxieties about time, value, and technology at their heart.

The effacement of technological mediation from the history of knowledge practices in higher education leads to my second supporting claim: humanist inquiry moves through time in both transcendent and material registers. The intimate connection between educator and student facilitated by the physical space of the classroom has become the standard to which all higher learning aspires. The perceived loss of this transcendental connection in contemporary educational environments drives narratives of nostalgia. In this second claim I reconstitute the mediating function of the book as the bridge between transcendental and material educational modes. The logic of the book as a technical device synthesizes the conceptual continuities of

¹³ Cassirer, *The Logic of the Humanities*, 53.

¹⁴ William Kuskin, *Recursive Origins* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 8.

¹⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 89.

generic, tropic, and imaginative memory through layers of technological mediation in time, a process acutely visible in the first centuries of print and the first decades of the digital age. As Bonnie Mak puts it in *How the Page Matters*, “the ‘print revolution’ and the ‘digital revolution’ were quickly constituted as comparable if not equivalent discontinuities in the history of books and reading.”¹⁶ What we perceive as disruption is really just a moment within larger patterns of continuity through which people encounter art through technology. Recognizing the presence of mediation at the heart of its relationship to the book challenges humanism to acknowledge its enduring debts to technology. The objects I study in the following chapters converge in questions about how users and interfaces transact cultural value and the authority of the past in the present moment. Each of these is an expression of vernacular technology, calling attention to the simultaneity of diachronic continuity and synchronic disruption. Driving my second claim is the conviction that the tension between transcendence and material social networks, rooted in technological mediation, lays the groundwork for synthesis of the narratives of nostalgia and the narratives of progress.

The third supporting claim of this dissertation is that in the history of higher learning, the canon of teaching and learning is just as determined by negotiations of cultural capital as is the canon of texts. As emergent educational innovations confront standard practices, narratives of nostalgia revert to established models to reinforce tradition. These conventional teaching and learning practices remain tacitly underscrutinized, resting on positions of high cultural capital as a result of convention and widespread acceptance. Narratives of progress then frame innovation as insurgency, disrupting complacency and inefficiency with systems seemingly more responsive to present concerns and crises. Thus my last claim loops back to inform the prior two: I

¹⁶ Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 6.

continually explore the dynamics through which vernacular mediation, characterized by low value in the marketplace, leverages technological innovation to draw the authority of the past (along with its high cultural capital) into encounters in the present. This is as true for printed vernacular romance narratives at the end of the fifteenth century as it is for comic books and massive open online courses (MOOCs) in the twenty-first. In approaching both content and practice together, I follow the work of Roger Chartier and Pierre Bourdieu, two influential critics whose works form an axis of critique from recognition of historical mediation to its influence on market capital, knowledge production, and behavior in contemporary cultural space. As Chartier says, describing Bourdieu's work, "it seems to me that one of the most acute moves in your research is to show that the self-evident is always constructed."¹⁷ My third supporting claim recognizes the constructedness of the self-evident when it calls for a close reading of teaching and learning practices within the larger historical arc of vernacular technological mediation. Just as books, readers, and ideas cohere and dissipate in the flow of time in response to technological change, so might teachers, learners, and the educational environments in which they collaborate. In the history of humanist inquiry, technological mediation reveals itself to be the organizing principle that links people, ideas, and material objects both in particular cultural moments and beyond them across time.

At its core, this dissertation considers how the convergence of humanist inquiry and digital technology both exposes the limitations of narratives of nostalgia and progress and implicates each in the larger project of higher learning as a product of mediation. As I pursue its thesis and supporting claims, I address two audiences specifically: humanities educators (particularly in those disciplines that take the book as their object of inquiry), and administrators

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier, *The Sociologist and the Historian*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 10.

and para-instructional staff across campus. With respect to the first audience, I draw heavily on a shared method of close reading, but with unconventional applications. This dissertation engages literary forms in canonical texts – such as Dante Alighieri’s fourteenth-century *Commedia* or Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s seventeenth-century *Don Quixote* – but it also close-reads the material objects that carry those literary forms through time and the technological platforms upon which teachers and learners encounter and interpret them in the digital age. By taking canonical literary books, comics and graphic novels, and online learning environments as equal objects of interrogation in pursuit of humanist knowledge, I expand the imaginative and material expression available for humanist inquiry and challenge its reliance on period, genre, and style as authoritative frames of reference. Beyond this, through close reading I expose the relationship these objects and interfaces facilitate as both art and people traverse time on pathways of cultural capital negotiated through layers of technological mediation. Effacing the history of this mediation has led teaching and learning practices in the humanities to devalue the changing terms and conditions of the digital age.

In addition to challenging conventional practices within humanities education, this dissertation reaches across institutional units. My second audience consists of academic and institutional administrators, academic technology divisions, and higher education staff devoted to the facilitation of teaching and learning design (both online and face-to-face). To the extent that it close-reads both the objects of culture and the practices teachers and learners develop to encounter them, this dissertation invites all stakeholders in the enterprise of higher learning to reflect on the relationships they build with technology in and through time. This shared mode of reflection is often neglected both in the scholarship and research of faculty and in the policy-making practices of university administration. If the narratives of nostalgia and progress are to

come together to build a platform for the future of higher education in America, these two audiences must find a space for active and ongoing collaboration. My aim is to generate points of commonality and expose the roots of conflict within a shared framework for productive dialog. The benefit of this dissertation to both of its audiences resides in its application of the rigor of literary scholarship to expose and express continuities in time, value, and technology and communicating how each shape the conditions of teaching and learning in the digital age.

Since the two audiences I address are not always explicitly brought together in a single argumentative frame, the methods I use to create a shared space for collaboration and the disciplinary fields I draw on require additional comment. My primary method, as I have established, is close reading. I embrace literary studies' commitment to parsing the literal and figurative resonances of imaginative language, exposing strategies of encounter between author and reader as each move through time. But in my approach to close reading I follow Guillory, who argues that "close reading, if it means anything, holds out the possibility that deep attention can be paid to nearly any cultural artifact, even those that seek to impose a stock response on us."¹⁸ The objects I encounter challenge conventional aesthetic approaches to close reading by not conforming to the historical genres and tropes through which literary close reading was developed (conditioned by forms like poem, novel, and play, as well as features like image, metaphor, metonymy, etc.). Throughout, I attend both narrative and material registers. This close reading approach is rooted in my commitment to recognizing mediation – and the dynamics of cultural capital that shape our reception of it – in all its forms. I am as interested in what these objects *are* as I am in what they *say* or *represent*. My approach aligns with my thesis: to know

¹⁸ John Guillory, "Close Reading: Prologue and Epilogue," *Association of Departments of Foreign Languages Bulletin*, 41, no. 3 (2011): 24-5.

the history of humanist inquiry is to encounter ideas as well as the objects that mediate them across time.

My methods of close reading across narrative, material, and digital modalities are indebted to the conventions of fields like media studies and posthumanism, in particular the idea of remediation theorized by Jay David Bolter and David Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* and the changing relationship between user and interface at the core of N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman*. Both books prove themselves flexible and strategic touchstones for this dissertation's exploration of value and mediation in time. In his theorization of close reading introduced above, Guillory resists divisions between "deep" and "hyper" attention, "whether we conceive the latter negatively or positively," calling on academics "to disabuse ourselves of the notion that there is an inherent conflict between literature and the new media."¹⁹ Bolter, Grusin, and Hayles are particularly adept readers of these levels of attention and the strategies used by cultural objects to engage them. In *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin argue "although each medium promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience, the promise of reform inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium."²⁰ Remediation "makes us aware that all media are at one level a 'play of signs,'" but nevertheless insists on media's "real, effective presence in our culture."²¹ According to Bolter and Grusin, remediation is a double logic, attempting to "erase all traces of mediation" through "immediacy" while also multiplying its media through "hypermediacy."²² Both immediacy and hypermediacy are driven by a shared desire "to get past the limits of

¹⁹ Guillory, "Close Reading," 24-5.

²⁰ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 19.

²¹ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 19.

²² *Ibid*, 5.

representation and to achieve the real.”²³ I apply remediation as a metric through which to understand not only how objects like early printed books and comics and graphic novels navigate the fields of cultural production, but also how different design environments – like physical classrooms, or MOOC platforms – shape practices of teaching and learning.

In histories of higher education, often indebted to the disciplinary expectations of history and philosophy, subjects of inquiry and the teaching and learning practices that shape them institutionally are rarely placed within their specifically mediated contexts. Posthumanism, as theorized by N. Katherine Hayles, sutures the remediation of objects to both individual and collective knowledge-making practices across time. For Hayles, the point of posthumanism is “that conceiving of information as a thing separate from the medium instantiating it is a prior imaginary act that constructs a holistic phenomenon as an information/matter duality.”²⁴ Posthumanism, in Hayles’ formulation, pairs with Bolter and Grusin’s remediation to posit technological mediation as a precondition for the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge in the long history of higher learning. These methodological and theoretical frameworks ground my close reading of the narratives of nostalgia and progress in diverse technological objects through the history of mediation in the form of the book, the encounters between memory and technology on the comic book page, and ultimately the collective meaning-making practices of the digital learning platform.

As a result of my investments in media studies and the intersections between humanist inquiry and technology, I locate this dissertation in relation, but not necessarily affinity, to the cluster of practices called “digital humanities” (DH). In some cases, DH involves reorienting the

²³ *Ibid*, 53.

²⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 13.

humanist's frame of reference relative to her object of scrutiny, such as Franco Moretti's "distant reading," an approach that deploys database technology to aggregate and illuminate the larger cultural, rhetorical, and narrative patterns that link genre, trope, and geography across time, understanding "literary development as a large bush: branches that coexist and bifurcate, that overlap and at times obstruct each other."²⁵ Moretti's method of DH is emblematic, synthesizing technology and critical theory to reinvent the practice of literary reading and analysis. Other DH approaches focus on leveraging technological affordances to make the lives and times of authors and texts come alive for scholars and, often, the public. One such venture is the *Folger Digital Texts* editions of the works of William Shakespeare, which go beyond digitizing historical play texts by providing navigation tools, editorial material, and concordance functionality in a modern and user-friendly web interface.²⁶ In these examples, technology becomes a means through which thinkers and readers understand patterns in cultural products as they exist in and across time. My investment in technology, however, is somewhat distinct from this. In this dissertation, technological mediation is itself the pattern. I am not invested in applying innovative technological operations to the study of literary history so much as I am using the unique contribution of literary studies – close reading – to illuminate the history of technological mediation in the production of humanist knowledge both established and emergent. Rather than engaging in digital humanities, then, this dissertation reorients humanism for the digital age. Rendering mediation more visible as a conditioning logic of both historical and innovative teaching and learning practices reframes crisis, and the narratives of nostalgia and progress that emerge from it, as continuity.

²⁵ Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso Books, 2013), Kindle edition, loc. 252.

²⁶ Barbara Mowat, Paul Werstine, Michael Poston, Rebecca Niles, eds., *Shakespeare's Plays, Sonnets and Poems* (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, n.d.), accessed February 8, 2017. www.folgerdigitaltexts.org.

This dissertation traces mediation both *across* time and *within* discrete cultural moments and technological objects. Thus, I have adopted a case study approach rather than adhering to disciplinary expectations of periodization. What links my disparate case studies, each a distinct set of technological mediations, is a sense of convergence in time and contestation of value. The processes by which vernacular forms emerge in innovative material expressions while also drawing transcendent literary authority downwards in acts of remediation threads each chapter together. The history of technological mediation, like the history of vernacular art, is the story of people encountering ideas and objects, in time. This is the premise of the historical project of humanism, and a conditioning factor in the nostalgia and progress currently paralyzing higher education. My case studies are parallel moments of encounter, alike in substance but different in accident. Printers and publishers structuring narrative experience as they negotiate the technology of the book construct similar frames of reference as educators reshaping the learning experience for students taking courses online as opposed to in the physical classroom. In other places, they are framed by differing velocities in time, alternately expanding and contracting literary history in acts of adaptation and compression. In each case, however, I demonstrate the presence of technological mediation as a mode of knowledge production and dissemination between people, ideas, and the objects that contain them in time. The focus of this dissertation's four chapters varies, but each comes back to a core tension between transcendent literary history and the material networks of books and readers that make it real.

Chapter 1, "The Logic of the Book: Mediation in the Lineage of the Liberal Arts," explores the tension created by two competing stories: securing legacy through narratives of nostalgia and changing the trajectory through narratives of progress. My thesis in this chapter is that the role technological mediation plays in the production, organization, and dissemination of

knowledge is effaced when critics idealize the work of the university as the transcendent encounter of mind and idea. I locate the poles of this tension in two works, William Caxton's *The Mirrour of the World* (1481) and John Henry Newman's 1852 lectures collected as *The Idea of a University*. Caxton's work emblemizes the printed book as a logic of knowledge production that records continuity in time by reproducing its inscribed materiality. Newman's lectures, by contrast, resist such materialization by using the mechanization of the printing press as a symbol of the erosion of meaningful learning. Reading Caxton and Newman together renders a history of higher education predicated on the effacement of technological mediation from knowledge-making while remaining reliant on that mediation to travel forward in time. From there, I trace the threads of nostalgia and progress in the rhetorical formulations of crisis in higher education, from Charles W. Eliot's charge to reform Harvard University to contemporary statistics on enrollment in online and face-to-face courses. I argue that the contemporary feeling of crisis is grounded in an anxiety about the relationship between established and emergent knowledge-making practices and defined by a misrepresentation of the role of technological mediation in the history of higher learning. Reasserting technology as part of the DNA of higher learning renders in sharper relief the narratives of nostalgia and progress emerging from the rhetoric of crisis, and the last part of the chapter addresses these narrative formulations directly. Institutions of higher learning, especially those emblematic of the lineage of the enterprise (prestigious public and private research institutions) find themselves in the midst of a renewed "two cultures" moment, no longer defined by the fissure between the arts and the hard sciences but instead by the encounters between historical precedent and technological innovation.

Chapter 2, "Humanism in the Flow of Vernacular Time," deepens the explorations of Chapter 1 by targeting technological mediation as a facilitator of encounters between people, art,

and knowledge. This chapter explores the relationship between transcendent literary history and the material networks through which early printers package it for readers of vernacular books. Chapter 2 argues that the dynamics of transcendent continuity and material networks in time form the central axis of humanist inquiry, both as it conditioned the production and reception of books in the late Middle Ages and as it shapes teaching and learning practices in the digital age. In “Genesis of the Media Concept,” John Guillory argues that “changes in the modes of social mediation can be inferred from the operation of technical media,” and as such “scholars of a traditional art such as literature must take equally seriously both the mediation of literature by technologies such as print – as they already do in the context of book history – and the long-durational forms of writing, such as genre.”²⁷ Guillory recognizes the need to analyze “multiple categorical mediations,” extending from narrative to genre to format.²⁸ Following Guillory’s lead, I frame my argument as an exploration of the vernacular literary history of romance, from Dante Aligheri’s *Commedia* to Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra’s *Don Quixote* to its spurious continuation by Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda. But I ground this history in the organizational logic of the book, its material paratexts, and its framing of readers and their experiences with time and authority. Chapter 2 argues that humanist inquiry must attend to both the transcendent continuity of literary time and the synchronic materiality of readers, books, and markets, a claim rooted in the theorization of cultural capital by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and interpreted by literary critics like Guillory and Harold Bloom. In parsing how the early printed book frames and moderates its reader’s encounters with time, value, and literary authority, Chapter 2 applies the argument of Chapter 1, reasserting technological mediation into the history of knowledge production in the humanities.

²⁷ John Guillory, “Genesis of the Media Concept,” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010): 354, 361.

²⁸ Guillory, “Genesis,” 361.

If Chapter 2 establishes humanism as an expression of temporal tension between transcendent literary continuity and the material networks of mechanically produced texts, Chapter 3, “Comics, Capital, and Continuity: Reading the Past in the Digital Age,” finds in comic books and graphic novels a contemporary analog. Comic books and graphic novels are sites of convergence in time and contestation of value. They are popular objects, reliant on technologies of mass production and distribution mechanisms indebted to and defined by the market. And yet they enter the academic marketplace with a different trajectory, their popular (and populist) histories circumscribed by the logic of authority and canon that define conventional pathways of academic study. Chapter 3 finds in comics the intersections of capital, material, and history that define the objects studied in the first two chapters. Their ascent of the ladder of cultural prestige emblemizes the tensions of aesthetic exclusion and scholarly homogeneity that have defined the modern university. Beyond this, the forms and formats of comic books and graphic novels inherit the manipulative strategies introduced by printed vernacular books at the end of the Middle Ages analyzed in Chapter 2, drawing readers into powerful constellations of memory, mediation, and innovation. Comics are both imaginative and commercial objects, uniquely suited to teach the academy how to reassert the legacy of higher learning within the increasingly market-dependent iterations of its present. To parse the formal, material, and cultural effects of the temporal tensions of the comic book page, Chapter 3 begins by reflecting on the rhetorical framing of comics scholarship in the work of two comics scholars, Bart Beaty and Hillary Chute. Then, I turn to examples from the form: Richard McGuire’s *Here*, Chris Ware’s *Building Stories*, and Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples’ *Saga*. The comics I explore in Chapter 3 intersect memory, nostalgia, innovative publication, and emergent digital

reading protocols. As such, I argue that the form participates in the long historical project of technological mediation in the production and dissemination of humanist knowledge.

Chapter 3 argues that comics challenges the traditional associations between value and time in the process of canon formation. As comic books do for readings lists, so MOOCs do for pedagogical practices. Chapter 4, “Online Learning, MOOCs, and the Emergence of Posthuman Humanism,” takes as its object the discussion forums of a humanities MOOC, positioning the engagement and learning taking place there as emblematic of the changing conditions of teaching and learning in the digital age. While MOOCs are only one phase in a long history of distance and online education, the rapidity of their rise and their hyper-visibility render them catalysts for the narratives of nostalgia and progress I trace throughout this dissertation. In the first part of the chapter, I posit MOOC discussion forums as an ideal site for investigation of meaningfully networked learning for two reasons: that because of their ubiquity they are often dismissed and unexplored, and that they create an educational environment largely self-regulated and community-driven. My study of the discussion forums in the Coursera MOOC “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” (run in fall 2013 and fall 2014) reveals an engaged network of learners whose interactions challenge the assumption that humanities education relies on the perceived value of physical presence to be meaningful. Following on the work of Henry Jenkins, who notes that “industry logic and academic critique alike focus too often on the value or sovereignty of the individual rather than on the social networks through which audience members play active roles,” in the second part of the chapter I extend the exploration of authenticity and artifice at the intersections of humanism and technology by tracing a movement away from the discrete authority of canon toward communities of practice and inquiry in the

massive open online course.²⁹ MOOCs and other educational innovations of the digital age are regularly set against idealized environments of learning like the elite lecture and the upper-division seminar, which operate under fundamentally different logics of presence, creating a false sense of incompatibility between meaningful education and technological mediation, on the one hand, and failing to invite advocates on either side of the issue into more nuanced discussion of how technologies like MOOCs can and should interface with the ideals of higher learning on the other. MOOCs expose anxieties about the future, anxieties rooted in fear of automation and, as Alain Bain and Lucia Zundans-Fraser put it, “an instrumental approach to the management of learning and teaching.”³⁰ MOOCs recognize continuity, not simply disruption, in the changing conditions of teaching and learning in the digital-age university.

In the digital age, higher learning dilates: not only are syllabi and reading lists bigger, broader, and more inclusive, the practices of teaching and learning made possible by innovations in technology and their applications to educational platforms challenge the pedagogical status quo. Many within institutions of higher learning confront this dilation as a threat; many outside of institutions of higher learning see in it great opportunity. In recent decades, these constituencies have had little to say to one another, leading to the felt experience of crisis, which is really just a tension between two competing narratives of nostalgia and progress. As I argue in this dissertation, emergent technological mediation and the negotiations of cultural capital it intensifies confront higher learning not with something fundamentally new and different but with the continuing conditions of its own legacy. In the organizational logic of the book, in the

²⁹ Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), xiii.

³⁰ Alain Bain and Lucia Zundans-Fraser, *Rising to the Challenge of Transforming Higher Education: Designing Universities for Learning and Teaching*, Springer Briefs in Education (Springer, 2016), 41.

vernacular memory of the comic book page, and in the collective knowledge-making practices of the online forum, humanism finds its continued capacity to mediate time and value. This dissertation recognizes that technology, as a symbol of loss and lament on the one hand and change and futurity on the other, has been positioned as a clear and present boundary against which idealizations of meaningful learning experiences are pressed. This tension, between the legacy of humanist education rendered through the rational individual subject of the Enlightenment and emergent posthuman modes of interconnection and dispersal, defines higher education today. Contemporary higher learning is predicated on the intersection of time and value. To understand that intersection, especially as it shapes contemporary questions of the future of teaching and learning practices at colleges and universities, we must recognize the continued presence of technological mediation in the history of people, ideas, objects, and the institutions that produce and contain them in time.

CHAPTER 1

THE LOGIC OF THE BOOK: MEDIATION IN THE LINEAGE OF THE LIBERAL ARTS

Institutions of higher learning balance being embedded in social and cultural moments with their own trans-historical endurance, confronting questions of legacy, change, and who sets the parameters for each. Technology – especially as it both instigates and necessitates a shift in the relationship between teacher, learner, and capital – marks a fault line between past and future. On one side are narratives of nostalgia, endeavoring to stabilize legacy as it influences current practice. On the other side, narratives of progress, acknowledging an onrushing future. Narratives of nostalgia and progress each rely on tension between technology, time, and value. What both narratives fail to acknowledge is that the binary between innovation and tradition is a false one. The transcendent legacy of people and ideas across time is, in practice, always a transaction negotiated by material, mechanical, and (now) digital technologies. Whether illuminated manuscript, printed book, or learning management system, technology always conditions the production of knowledge. Both narratives err when they ignore the role technology has played in setting and realizing the goals of higher learning embedded *in time* and communicated *through time*. My thesis in this chapter is that framing technology as an immanent threshold across which higher learning will inexorably change effaces the material and intellectual history of technological mediation in the making of knowledge. Reconstituting that history within the contemporary rhetoric of crisis repositions mediation as an agent of continuity, shaping rather than breaking the conditions of teaching and learning in the digital age.

In this chapter I unpack the intersections of legacy and innovation in representations of higher learning and educational technology.¹ As Neil Selwyn points out, discussions about how technology shapes the enterprise of higher learning are “being taken very seriously by policy-makers, industrialists and many other powerful groups *outside* of education” but not always by those agents “*inside* education,” despite the fact that they “are beginning to feel the effects.”² If higher education “serves both innovation and preservation functions,” as Laura M. Harrison and Peter C. Mather argue, the rhetoric of crisis and the narratives of nostalgia and progress that condition it sever this duality.³ I pursue these questions in three parts, each of which reflects on the intersection of traditional notions of the liberal arts, humanities, and technology. In the first part of the chapter, I explore the role mediation has played in the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. I argue that the history of higher education is marked by a tension between different modes of encounter – between reading the book and absorbing the lecture. I read William Caxton’s printed edition of *The Mirrour of the World* (1481), an early encyclopedia of sorts, as an emblem of the former, and “Discourse VI” on knowledge and technology from Cardinal John Henry Newman’s 1852 lectures *The Idea of a University* as an emblem of the latter. Caxton embraces the technology of the book as a producer and organizer of knowledge, reflected in the development of the classical and medieval curriculum of the seven liberal arts. Newman, on the other hand, effaces this history of mediation in favor of a model of knowledge-

¹ Educational technology is a broad field, encompassing innovations in learning management systems, synchronous and asynchronous platforms, self-assessment and peer-assessment mechanisms, flipped classrooms, open educational resources, competency-based, adaptive, and personalized learning, and each of these being designed variously for small classroom use and at scale. Each strategy is linked by its reliance on technological mediation between teacher, student, and content.

² Neil Selwyn, *Is Technology Good for Education?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), ix.

³ Laura M. Harrison and Peter C. Mather, *Alternative Solutions to Higher Education’s Challenges: An Appreciative Approach to Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 146.

making reliant on the transcendent play of minds. Emerging from these lineages, in the second part of the chapter I reframe the rhetoric of crisis within this history of effacement, parsing responses to the current state of higher education both mechanical and ideological. Anxieties about the changing relationship of teaching, learning, and technology mark the emergence of a new “two cultures” in the higher education community, to borrow C.P. Snow’s famous formulation.⁴ “Two cultures” no longer represents a simple separation of the hard sciences from the humanities but a broader engagement with questions of legacy and progress, of public and private good, with technology on the fault line. In the third part of the chapter, I elaborate the dominant wings of this division – nostalgia and progress – by reading the legacy of Newman’s technological effacement and Caxton’s technological innovation in the rhetorical constructions of the history and future of higher education. From buildings to books, from Moodle to MOOCs, technology has been used to divide the present between past and future, either a corrosive threat to the legacy of higher learning or a catalyst for necessary reform.

At the core of this chapter is the conviction that higher education in the digital age needs a new operative term: not disruption, but continuity. Recognizing technological mediation in both the history and the future of higher learning allows the changing needs of the present to interface the enterprise’s highest ideals. The logic of crisis has been used as a dodge to avoid meaningful engagement with the deeper anxieties about continuity and time, more a “rhetorical

⁴ C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures: and a Second Look* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964). Snow’s lectures explored the binary between disciplinary formations of STEM and the humanities, identifying “literary intellectuals at one pole – at the other scientists, and as the most representative, the physical scientists. Between the two a gulf of mutual incomprehension.” Snow, *The Two Cultures*, 4. Snow made visible the underlying stereotypes that defined the relationships between academic fields, the types of stereotypes reified by offhand comments like those that open J.H. Plumb’s *Crisis in the Humanities* from 1964: “quips from Cicero are uncommon in the engineer’s lab; Ahab and Jael rarely provide a parable for biologists.” *Crisis in the Humanities*, ed. J.H. Plumb (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 7.

sentiment” than a “description of an actual emergency,” as Jon McGee put it in 2015.⁵ But the transformation to rhetoric from reality does not absolve us from attention to the word and its effects. Whether crisis is accepted wholesale, challenged by a substitute term, or explicitly rejected, it is woven firmly into the way many educators understand the relation of their work to the institutions they inhabit and the publics they serve. The question becomes: why, if mostly rhetorical, should we pay attention to crisis at all? More than a state of being, crisis names a process by which agents within higher education attempt either to reactivate the past in the conditions of the present or overlay a speculative tomorrow onto a resistant today. In both cases, technology is rhetorically weaponized, a tool to dismantle traditional teaching and learning or a building block to a utopian future. Crisis tacitly sets up a boundary in time, between then and now. But “then,” in this formulation, is two-faced. Looking back, “then” becomes mythic; looking forward, it becomes salvific. The myth of universities past, marked by oak trees, sherry sipping, and Shakespeare rubs against “the university of everywhere.”⁶ Understanding the integration of meaningful learning and educational technology requires synthesis of these two temporal frames. By returning to William Caxton at the end of the fifteenth century and John Henry Newman in the middle of the nineteenth – two key moments of intersection between the lineage of knowledge production in the liberal arts and the innovations of print technology – this chapter begins by reading technological mediation back into the history of higher learning.

⁵ Jon McGee, *Breakpoint: The Changing Marketplace for Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 20.

⁶ For sherry and Shakespeare, see Tanya Loughead, *Critical University: Moving Higher Education Forward* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 1. I borrow “the university of everywhere” from Kevin Carey, *The End of College: Creating the Future of Learning and the University of Everywhere* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015).

Anxiety, Effacement, and Technological Knowing

The production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge in the liberal arts relies on technological mediation. This fact is often obscured by the inclination toward transcendent connections that link people and intellectual history in time, a premise of the enterprise of higher education. Those disciplines most emblematic of that historical enterprise, like the humanities fields of language, literature, philosophy, and history, find themselves in a paradoxical position: they must use the ideas of the past, leveraged through historical objects, to generate new knowledge in the present and, ultimately, shape minds for the future. In this formulation, the student must simultaneously embrace historical materiality and its effacement in pursuit of trans-historical knowledge. The success of humanities inquiry rests on its ability to facilitate encounters between the past and the present, but these encounters resonate in both conceptual and material registers. The “idea” of the university has always fallen somewhere between bringing people together to engage in the transcendent play of concepts and grounding those encounters in the materiality of the world. In this section, I trace a history of this mediation and its effacement as it conditions the humanities by examining strategies for knowledge forged by, and then in opposition to, the printed book.

The underestimation of technological mediation in the history of inquiry underlies contemporary definitions of the humanities as they have been harnessed in defense of the legacy of higher education. Take, for example, the treatment of technology provided by Geoffrey Galt Harpham in a recent collection of essays titled *The Humanities and the Dream of America*. Harpham’s initial definition exposes its debts to mediation. “Humanities” means “*the scholarly study of documents and artifacts produced by human beings in the past enables us to see the*

*world from different points of view so that we may better understand ourselves.”*⁷ Harpham articulates his definition as a thesis, more a declaration of what humanities inquiry *does* than what it *is*. What it does is bring the past – both the “*documents and artifacts*” and the human beings that made them – into the present such that we might learn about ourselves through them. The activity of the humanities is fundamentally temporal, but complexly so. Inquiry moves diachronically, but always within a particular synchronic frame of reference. The movement from the past to the present requires a movement from the present to the past – “*scholarly study*.” A loop forms, continually drawing adherents through the present conditions to the past and back again. In Harpham’s vision of the humanities, the past and the present work together in a process of recursive immersion.

For Harpham, the humanities acts as a “springboard for innovation and progress,” not just a conservator of the past, not just tradition defined by “its inertial insistence on the past,” but also its “malleability and responsiveness” in the present.⁸ Harpham’s humanities looks to the future, balancing historical inquiry and innovative change without sacrificing awareness of the changing conditions of the present moment. The problem with this argument, however, is that the innovative potential of humanities education remains conceptual. When confronted with the material substantiation of those changing conditions, the reactionary eclipses the progressive. Harpham’s resistance to technology emerges as much in his prose as in his argument. On page 98, Harpham delivers empowering sentences about springboards, innovation, and responsiveness. These sequences form the triumphant climax of a chapter exploring the temporal dimensions of humanities inquiry. Then, as readers look from verso to recto and the start of a

⁷ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 5-6. (emphasis in original).

⁸ Harpham, *The Humanities*, 98.

new chapter, the scene changes. On page 99, as Harpham describes the various causes for the perceived declines in popularity and cultural command of the English major, the tools of the digital age take center stage:

other causes, however, are simply attributes of the larger culture: the shortening of the collective attention span through a surfeit of information; the tinnitus effect of a noisy, vulgar, and invasive popular culture; a general tendency to vocationalism and professionalism in higher education; the ceaseless invitation to distraction issued by our increasingly compelling electronic gadgets; the grinding effects of the economics of education; and the atmosphere of nonstop hysteria generated by the media.⁹

Coming a few lines of prose after a vision of the past interacting with the present to cultivate the future, the tools through which that future is made and expressed become distracting and destructive to the conditions of humanities inquiry. This passage is expansive in its critique, positing shifting modes of technological mediation (expressed through several metaphors: tinnitus, vulgarity, invasion, and hysteria) as the cause of degraded cognitive capacities (shortening of attention, vocationalism, etc). Technology, for Harpham, is the breaking point upon which the flexibility of tradition dissolves. Harpham asserts the trans-historical endurance of humanities knowledge but effaces the basic mechanisms of technological mediation required to make it possible.

The tension in Harpham's essay is emblematic of the temporal negotiations facing not only the humanistic disciplines but the institutions of higher learning they populate. Instead of looking at this as a crisis in the present, I argue that technological mediation has fundamentally

⁹ *Ibid*, 99.

conditioned the relationship between teacher, learner, and knowledge production throughout the history of the enterprise. To demonstrate this, I turn to two historical examples, one emblematic of the embeddedness of knowledge in time and material, the other of the endeavor of knowledge producers to transcend their own materiality. The first example is *The Mirrour of the World*, printed by William Caxton in England in 1481. The second example is “Discourse VI,” part of Cardinal John Henry Newman’s 1852 collection *The Idea of a University*. Caxton’s and Newman’s works present two historical models of knowledge making: the printed book and the occasional lecture. The former insists on its own materiality; the latter attempts to efface it even as it relies on mediation to move through time.

William Caxton (c.1422 – c.1492), an English merchant, printer, and translator, learned his craft in Bruges and Cologne and brought the enterprise of printing to England in the 1470s. Caxton’s source text for *The Mirrour of the World* is a French manuscript (British Museum MS Roy. 19A IX) written in Bruges in 1464. The French text emerges from a textual tradition dating back to 1245, when the *Mirrour* was a poem in 6,594 octosyllabic verses, and then shortly after to 1247 when the poem was expanded. This poem was also written as a prose text (both versions presumed to be authored by Gossuin of Metz) and went through different iterations and translations before coming to the form in which Caxton encountered it.¹⁰ Caxton’s *The Mirrour of the World* is a book embedded in time in two registers: material and conceptual. As William Kuskin notes in *Symbolic Caxton*, Caxton’s first edition in 1481 was printed “during a period of heavy investment in new technology” for the English printer and publisher: “the *Mirrour* is printed in Type 2*, a new version of his standard type,” and “around this time he also purchased

¹⁰ William Caxton, *The Mirrour of the World*, ed. Oliver H. Prior (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), vii-ix.

new ‘two-pull’ presses.”¹¹ James A. Knapp recognizes the book as a “strangely hybrid” object conceptually and generically, at once a “medieval compendium or encyclopedia” and a “handbook of practical knowledge” that looks forward to the “Almanacs and ‘how to’ books which would become so popular in the 16th and 17th centuries.”¹² Caxton’s edition of *The Mirrour of the World* may not hold much value to readers today in terms of factual accuracy about knowledge in the physical world, unless we are interested in learning about a “fyffhe fo huge and grete that on his backe groweth erth and graffe; and femeth properly that it is a grete Ile” living in the land of “Ynde” (sig. f7r).¹³ Its enduring value resides not in its facts but in its organizational logic, its DNA as a book.

The *Mirrour* demonstrates the embeddedness of technological mediation in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Two scales of time define the book: first, linear continuity, a movement from source to adaptation through time; second, disruption and remediation in moments of transition (from manuscript to print, from verse to prose, from compendium to handbook). In these temporal frames, the *Mirrour* reflects doubly: it presents not only the accumulated knowledge of the world up to its time but also emblemizes the continually changing conditions of that world’s production and dissemination of knowledge. The text allegorizes the mediation of the book, exposing through form, through style, and through material organization how media both carries knowledge through and across time and produces it in discrete synchronic moments.

¹¹ William Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 43.

¹² James A. Knapp, “Translating for Print: Continuity and Change in Caxton’s *Mirrour of the World*” *Disputatio* 3 (1998): 68.

¹³ All quoted passages from Caxton’s *Mirrour* are from: Gossuin of Metz, *The Mirrour of the World*, Westminster, 1481. STC 24762. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, EEBO.

Caxton's book engages knowledge-making in both visual and textual modes. The *Mirroure* is the first book printed in England to contain woodcuts, a point Caxton emphasizes as crucial to the book's capacity to produce meaningful knowledge in readers.¹⁴ In his prefatory material, Caxton reminds readers that in this book, "a man reſonable / may ſee and vnderſtande more clerer...the ſituacion and moeuyng of the firmament" but only "by the viſytinge and ſeeyng of it and the figures therin" (sig. a4^v). Without the figures, the book "may not lightly be vnderſtande" (sig. a4^v). The dual modes of knowledge production contribute to Caxton's intention for the book, to be plain and simple enough for widespread use. As Knapp notes, in orienting the book toward "a readership beginning to form outside the bounds of the medieval European intellectual community, Caxton not only capitalized on an untapped market, he also contributed to its formation."¹⁵ His use of woodcuts in addition to prose text probably denotes his "desire to produce a close approximation of his MS copy," as the French MS upon which Caxton's text is based contained substantial illustrations.¹⁶ But in the context of the book's already complex relationship to the technologies of its production and organization, the woodcuts participate in the book's symbolic work as well. While the *Mirroure*'s woodcuts are not technically sophisticated, they form with the text simultaneous and symbiotic feeds of information, suggesting the inextricability of the book's utility for readers and the technological mediation required for its production and realization.¹⁷

¹⁴ Caxton, *The Mirroure of the World*, v.

¹⁵ Knapp, "Translating for Print," 70.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁷ Utility is indeed privileged over aesthetics. Edward Hodnett, the first scholar to catalogue and index woodcuts in English printed books in the last decades of the 15th century and the first decades of the 16th, calls the cuts in Caxton's *Mirroure* "some of the poorest cuts ever inserted between covers," and hopes that "Caxton was disgusted by such hacking." Edward Hodnett, *English Woodcuts 1480-1535* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 1.

To unpack the layers of technological mediation that condition the production and dissemination of knowledge in Caxton's *Mirroure*, we need look no further than the book's prologue and the woodcut that introduces it (sig. a4^r). The first lines of the prologue unequivocally privilege recorded knowledge and the written word. Caxton's text, which has been expanded from the French source MS, starts:

Confideryng that wordes ben periffhyng / vayne / & forgetful / and writynges
duelle & abide permanêt / as I rede Vox audita perit littera fcripta manet / Thife
things haue caufed that the faites and dedes of Anncyent menn / ben fette by
declaracion in fair and Aourned volumes / to thende that fciencie and Artes lerned
and founden of thinges paffed myght be had in perpetuel memorye and
remembraunce. (sig. a4^r)

Words are perishing and subject to the vagaries of memory when they are merely spoken, whereas they are permanent when they are written. The *Mirroure* paints in broad strokes here (we know that books are not so stable nor so permanent). But Caxton is adamant to push on the boundaries that divide voice and text in time, adding the proverb “vox audita perit littera fcripta manet” (“the heard voice perishes, the written letter remains”). It is the written letter and its accumulation in books and “volumes” that facilitated the learning of “things paffed” such that they remain in “perpetuel memorye and remembraunce.” In Caxton's formulation, the book responds to the needs of knowledge, recognizing the condition of its impermanence and stepping in to record and preserve. The book is a living artifact in time, suggested by Caxton's turn to metaphors of inhabitation in his insistence that “writynges duelle & abide permanêt,” inhabiting the negotiations between ideas of the past, technologies of the present, and needs of the future.

The *Mirroure* posits the repository of the book, capable of signifying through visual, textual, and tactile means, as the key agent in the organization and dissemination of knowledge.

What is interesting about this particular book, however, is how well it emblemizes the tension produced in the responsiveness of the book form and the participatory relationship it invites with its readers. Books are containers of knowledge, objects in which the “the faites and dedes of Annecyent menn / ben fette.” But in framing the knowledge of the past in both aesthetically pleasing and logically structured ways (“fair and Aoured volumes”), books also actively produce and shape knowledge in readerly encounters. The woodcut that Caxton inserts at the start of the prologue, what the reader sees just before reading the passage quoted above, complicates the sentiment of the text. The illustration depicts a master sitting in a position of authority over his students and gesturing with his hands as if delivering a lecture to them. (Fig. 1.1) The students hold books, looking variously at them, at the master, and distractedly out of the frame. The woodcut depicts the kind of scene Caxton’s prologue resists when it privileges written over spoken language in the communication of knowledge. Interestingly, Caxton’s woodcut changes the scene from the corresponding illumination in the French manuscript, which depicts a master writing in a book resting on a lectern.¹⁸ Caxton’s woodcut converts the scene from one of writing to one of speaking, while at the same time emphasizing the opposite in his text. Caxton’s inversion from writing to speaking highlights the juxtaposition of transcendence and materiality the *Mirroure* itself represents. His woodcut illustrates the rarified environment of the school, the hierarchy of knowledge transmitted from master to student and bounded by the walls of the classroom. But this illustration is embedded within a printed book, a mass-produced repository of knowledge whose stated intention is to serve a wide, non-specialist audience.

¹⁸ Knapp, “Translating for Print,” 77-8.

As if recognizing that fundamental tension, one of the book's early readers took action. Figure 1.1 is a page from the standard modern edition of *The Mirrour of the World*, edited by Oliver H. Prior for the Early English Text Society in 1913. The book reproduces the text (lightly edited with expanded contractions, etc.) along with the original woodcuts, in roughly the same page positions. But Prior's note on the prologue woodcut pulls readers toward a more complex story than the simple inversion from written to oral delivery I have identified above: "In the wood-cut reproduced here, a scroll, issuing from the magister's mouth, with the words '*audita pereunt, scripta manent*,' has been inserted in ink."¹⁹ Prior references this handwritten addition but does not reproduce it. This is an interesting choice, considering a handwritten addition to the lecture woodcut of the spoken words "*audita pereunt, scripta manent*," shown in Figure 1.2, represents an important resistance to Caxton's choice to change the scene depicted in the original French woodcut. The lecture emblemizes the ephemerality of language, privileging knowledge transmission through speech. Inscribing that sentiment on the woodcut itself and indeed breaking through the borders of the woodcut's square frame into the wider page space, the addition at once reifies it and undermines it, changing the illustration in the manner of recording Caxton's text privileges as the primary mode of access to past knowledge. A reader or professional in the book trade somewhere in the book's history has recognized the incongruity of the prologue text and the woodcut and attempted to reconcile the two. In the process, that reader highlights the central tension of the book, between the transcendent transmission of knowledge through time and the material instantiations of that knowledge in present moments, mediated by technology.

As presented in the context of Prior's edition of the *Mirrour* for the Early English Text Society, this handwritten addition is a historical curiosity relegated to the notes. It records a

¹⁹ Caxton, *The Mirrour of the World*, 5 n.1.

moment of encounter between an individual book and an individual reader, and presents scholars with a bit of irony. But the copy of the *Mirroure* containing the handwritten addition is also the base text scanned for the repository service Early English Books Online (EEBO) hosted by the British Library, a project digitizing the books recorded in the English Short Title Catalog (STC). Suddenly, an unusual handwritten addition to an individual early printed book becomes the enduring standard via channels of both physical (via microfilm) and digital replication. Considering the STC and EEBO are the primary points of access for readers and scholars of early printed material across the university system and beyond, the anecdotal and idiosyncratic becomes normative. Through processes of mechanical and digital remediation, an intimate moment of encounter between a book and its reader becomes canon, the emblem of the book and its legacy in time. The handwritten speech bubble grants contemporary readers access to not only the use-history of the book but also the convergence of conceptual and material formulations of knowledge toward which the *Mirroure* consistently directs them. The complicated history of this woodcut concretizes the book as an object with a material history despite the invitations of its content to the transcendent knowledge of the cosmos.

Caxton's *Mirroure* introduces itself in the prologue and accompanying woodcut as a book invested in multi-modal knowledge production grounded in technological mediation that draws together the legacy of historical knowledge and the innovative technologies of print. Much of the remainder of the first part of the *Mirroure* explores the formation of the seven liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), the most important organizer of disciplinary knowledge during the medieval period. These disciplines schematize the classical pursuit of the *studia humanitatis*, the study of human culture and the physical world, and still influence the organization of the modern university (colleges of arts and sciences, for

example). The *Mirroure* continually emphasizes the value of inscribing and recording in this process. The first philosophers were “longe in studye and vnderstood moche,” and, to help cultivate knowledge in those who come after, “alle that they vnderftode and knewe, they put it in wrytyng the best wise they coude” (sig. b7^v). The act of writing is the means of future learning, protection against the ephemerality of the spoken word. Writing helps the first philosophers organize their expansive and expanding knowledge, a recording system that reinforces the interrelationship between emergent disciplinary distinctions: “and they be in suche wise entrelaced that they may not be auctorised that one without that other ne entirely preysed; and also the first may not be perfightly conned withoute the laste, ne the laste wythout the firste” (sig. c1^r). The *Mirroure*’s verbs, “auctorised” and “preysed,” are telling – “auctorised” means to authorize, but also to ground that authority in the historical legacy of authorship. And “preysed” registers as both praised and appraised, adoring but also critically examining, a process by which value is determined. Thus writing and recording organizes the growing body of knowledge within the system of the seven arts and sciences and, through the logic of the book, lends this disciplinary knowledge value.

While Caxton’s *Mirroure* is an accumulation of the information of the classical and medieval world, or at least one particular iteration of that body of knowledge, it also is itself an object that actively shapes that knowledge. In its commitment to the value of the liberal arts, the *Mirroure* sets out to define the difference between material and transcendent knowing. For instance, something like the study of medicine “is not liberal, ffor it serueth to hele mannes body whiche ellis oftentimes myght lightly perysshe” (sig. c6^v). Only those disciplines that “serueth to the soule deserueth in the world to haue name liberal” because it is the soul alone that comes from and returns to God (sig. c6^v). This is not a radical position to take for a book about

knowledge in the late Middle Ages. But there is a useful irony in the fact that, while the book downplays material or bodily knowledge as less deserving of the prestigious title “liberal,” it consistently leverages its own material form and the technologies required to realize it as critical participants in the production and dissemination of knowledge in and among the book’s readers. If, as the *Mirroure* reads in chapter seven, “God made the world by worde, and the worde is to the world fentence” (sig. c4^v), material ink on paper ushers knowledge into the world and, beyond this, endures within it and lends it meaning (“fentence”). Even as the content of the *Mirroure* privileges the transcendent transmission of knowledge from God to soul and back, its pages ground us in the generative potential of mediation. Caxton’s vernacular book stands as a site of consolidation and dispersal, of convergence and contest, drawing threads of traditional knowledge together in the logic of the book but then spreading that knowledge widely through networks of technological mediation.

Caxton’s *Mirroure* makes a powerful case for the embeddedness of media technologies in the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. As shown in my analysis of the prologue woodcut, the book highlights a tension in the history of disciplinary knowledge between oral delivery in the school and written, printed record in the academic and public marketplaces. Caxton’s print enterprise by no means resolved this tension, and indeed the divisions between transcendent orality and grounded materiality continue to condition the academy and the understanding of the life of the mind. Enlightenment philosopher and cultural critic Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, in “A Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences,” objects to the “dreadful art” of printing for precisely the reasons Caxton develops it: printing allows “pernicious reflections” – like those of, say, Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza – to “last forever,” whereas ages past knew not the “art of immortalizing the errors and

extravagances of the human mind.”²⁰ Rousseau rejects technological mediation as a process of recording the production and organization of knowledge, and does so explicitly with respect to its effects in and through time. This tension can be found in one of the seminal expressions of the goals and aspirations of higher learning, *The Idea of a University* by Cardinal John Henry Newman (b.1801 – d.1890), a Catholic scholar and educator. *The Idea* is a series of nine discourses delivered as lectures in Dublin in 1852 and then subsequently published in book form in 1852 and 1858. In Newman’s work, the transcendent reciprocity of knowledge between the soul and God comes out full force, and the anxiety over the creeping influence of the mechanical and technical intensifies. This is especially true in Discourse VI, “Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning.” In this lecture, Newman explores the relation of the mind and its development to the various streams of information confronting it in his contemporary moment. Whereas Caxton’s *Mirroure* playfully juxtaposes its content and its medium of organization and dispersal, in “Discourse VI” Newman emphatically opposes meaningful knowledge and technological mediation.

In Newman’s formulation, the communication of knowledge consists of an enlargement of mind. This enlargement can happen along many vectors (natural, religious, etc.). The conditioning factor is not the disciplinary taxonomy of the information but the relationship the mind establishes with it in time, either a fall backward or a press forward. Newman rejects a model of learning that positions the mind as static: true enlargement does not happen “merely in the passive reception into the mind of a number of ideas hitherto unknown to it.”²¹ Rather, enlargement occurs “in the mind’s energetic and simultaneous action upon and towards and

²⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and the Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole, Everyman’s Library, no. 162 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 26.

²¹ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 97-8.

among those new ideas, which are rushing in upon it.”²² In the first case, the mind falls back and allows the information to enter it, a passive process that, for Newman, does not yield meaningful learning. In the latter, the mind interacts with the information streams, counterbalancing the “rushing in upon it” by venturing forward to meet information head on. This mode of relation between mind and information facilitates Newman’s conception of the function of the university, established in the preface to the lectures: “it is a place of *teaching universal knowledge*.”²³ Newman’s learning takes place in a conceptual space, the active wrestling of mind and information yielding knowledge.

These are not unusual ideas, and indeed much student-centered pedagogy today ultimately boils down to the same core sentiment. But Newman remains suspect of any form of mediation that might disrupt the conceptual play of mind, information, and knowledge. He grounds his critique in the changing conditions of access to information:

All things now are to be learned at once, not first one thing, then another, not one well, but many badly. Learning is to be without exertion, without attention, without toil; without grounding, without advance, without finishing. There is to be nothing individual in it; and this, forsooth, is the wonder of the age. What the steam engine does with matter, the printing press is to do with mind; it is to act mechanically, and the population is to be passively, almost unconsciously enlightened, by the mere multiplication and dissemination of volumes. Whether it be the school boy, or the school girl, of the youth at college, or the mechanic in

²² Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 98.

²³ *Ibid*, 3.

the town, of the politician in the senate, all have been the victims in one way or other of this most preposterous and pernicious of delusions.²⁴

In this passage, Newman carefully positions changing procedures of learning and the shifting media across which teaching and learning are transacted as disruptors of the relationship between mind and knowledge. Newman establishes a current problem, “all things now,” and then describes how the conditions of that problem challenge the idea of the university. The steam engine and printing press each alter the relationship between human labor and cultural production.²⁵ The resulting layers of mechanical automation render human agents passive. Newman positions these shifts in media and production as markers of epistemological and procedural erosion, the possibility of learning benefitting from mechanization constitutes a dangerous delusion. The logic of the book exploited by Caxton toward the gain of knowledge becomes, in Newman’s formulation, a liability that dilutes the purity of the rarified learning transaction. Technological mediation is incapable of sustaining the conceptual play of mind and information that Newman privileges in “Discourse VI.”

Automation and mechanization triggers Newman’s anxiety about transcendent knowledge production. Newman is careful, however, to distance himself from those qualities we often associate with the rejection of emergent technologies, elitism (“it must not be supposed

²⁴ *Ibid*, 103.

²⁵ Newman likely refers to the steam-powered printing press introduced in the first decades of the nineteenth century, a development that increased consistency, efficiency, and scale of the print enterprise. In *The Nature of the Book*, Adrian Johns posits the steam press as a marker of the “development of truly mechanized printing,” a moment when “industrialized printing and publishing moved from the home to the factory.” Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 629. Likewise, S.H. Steinberg claims that the steam press “brought printing into the Industrial Revolution,” increasing the output of the press from 300 sheets per hour to 1,100. S.H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, New edition, rev. John Trevitt (London: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 1955/1996), 139.

that...I have some sort of fear of the education of the people”) and ludditism (“nor am I the enemy to the cheap publication of scientific and literary works”).²⁶ He merely wants to “call things by their right names”: “do not say, the people must be educated, when, after all, you only mean, amused, refreshed, soothed, put into good spirits and good humour, or kept from vicious excesses.”²⁷ For Newman, knowledge transacted through mechanics is only capable of that much, not on the same level as the conceptual play of mind and “universal *knowledge*” that is the mission of the university. Newman endorses the view of education represented in Caxton’s woodcut of the lecturing master in the prologue of the *Mirroure*, and rejects the mediated history of the formation of the liberal arts narrated in the *Mirroure*’s prose and the woodcut’s handwritten augmentation. No process grounded in technological mediation can yield the kind of knowledge upon which the *idea* of the university is to be premised.

The irony of Newman’s sentiment, of course, is that other than the small group of gentleman to whom these lectures were delivered in 1852, every person who encounters Newman’s ideas does so through multiple layers of technological mediation. By aligning the printing press with the workings of mechanical industry as a way of dismissing it, Newman bars the technology of the book from the cultivation of meaningful learning – even his own. For example, I encounter Newman’s ideas across the pages of a printed book. Specifically, a book edited by Frank M. Turner as part of the “Rethinking the Western Tradition” series published by Yale University Press in 1996. In this book, Newman’s lectures are situated between an extended editorial introduction at the start, and notes, a glossary, a set of contemporary interpretive essays branded “Rethinking *The Idea of a University*,” and a list of suggested auxiliary readings. Thus, the original lectures are transposed to writing and nestled within the standard editorial and

²⁶ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 104.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

paratextual apparatus expected of contemporary academic editions. Like the handwritten scroll on *Mirrou* a4^r, I read Newman in tension between the spoken and the written, the lived and the recorded. This is one layer of technological mediation. But within that layer is a more than 150-year-long process of printing, reprinting, microfilm adaptations, excerpts published as standalone books or as journal articles, translations to different languages, audio books, digitized editions available through university libraries and the Internet Archive (archive.org), as well as hypertext editions like the one hosted by the Cardinal Newman Society (newmanreader.org). In all, Worldcat.org lists 932 discrete entries for “all formats and editions” of *The Idea of a University*, spanning 1852 to 2017, a set that does not include the thousands of books by other authors that reference or quote Newman (like this one).²⁸ After the initial moment of delivery, Newman’s idea of the university has been sustained in time by the operation of technological mediation.

The layers of mediation get even richer when considering how these ideas are put to use in practices of teaching and learning. I initiated my encounter with Newman by checking out *The Idea of a University* from the university library and reading it. I marked passages I wanted to interrogate further by placing plastic flags in the margins, re-typing those passages into my notes document using word processing software, then copying and pasting them into a separate draft document. From there, you are reading the finalized document either electronically or physically, depending on your preference and access to network-connected devices. All of this is to say that Newman’s ideas about the university do not float transcendent through time – they grind their way through typesetter hands and publisher warehouses and computer algorithms. The very forms of media and automation that Newman deplores in “Discourse VI” are those that make possible our continued access to his idea of the university. It is true that “*teaching* universal

²⁸ “Worldcat.org,” *OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc.*, searched November 5, 2016, http://www.worldcat.org/search?qt=worldcat_org_all&q=%22the+idea+of+a+university%22.

knowledge” should not always happen in the same modes of production found in “a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill.”²⁹ But ignoring the operations through which technology mediates our access to knowledge effaces an important continuity with the lineage of liberal learning and ignores the ground upon which most practices of teaching and learning rest. Newman’s ideas are not defined by the purity of their transmission in a room 150 years ago, but rather in their remediation across time, across technological platforms, and across divergent points of access.

Technology, Crisis, and the Idea of the University

John Henry Newman’s formulation of the ideal university premises learning upon the conceptual play between mind and information. For Newman, the mind presses into the flow of ideas, engaging, shaping, and ultimately producing knowledge. Newman’s university relies on a form of intellectual continuity that floats above the contingencies of the material world. More than this, it explicitly rejects what it deems superficial and incapable of substantive meaning in the nature of the mass-produced thing – mediation shatters the illusion. If William Caxton’s *The Mirrour of the World* reminds readers of the tension between people, ideas, and objects as each move through time, Newman’s *The Idea of a University* effaces it. What has been taken up by subsequent visions of higher education, though, is not just Newman’s explicit rejection of specific technological objects but also the broadly understood influence of mechanism, industry, and the market forces that collude to produce them in the ostensibly intellectual space of the university. The type of erasure I read in Newman shapes subsequent debates about utility, organization, and ultimately the future of the enterprise of higher education. Technology

²⁹ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 105.

becomes, in these formulations, a negative metaphor. Stripped of its material mediation in the production and dissemination of knowledge, technology stands in for a variety of forces challenging the intellectual encounters of mind and information privileged by Newman.

In this section and the next, I trace the legacy of Caxton's embrace and Newman's effacement of the history of technology in the debates over the function and utility of the university as it developed in America in the last century and a half, culminating in the contemporary rhetoric of crisis. My claim is that higher education is now experiencing a new "two cultures" moment, this time fueled less by distinctions in disciplinary knowledge practices (as it was in the 1950s and 1960s) and more by the increased instability of the fault lines in time and mission exposed by technology. Technology, in this sense, must be understood as a flexible metaphorical category, referring not always to actual objects or processes of mediation but to an overall orientation toward teaching and learning. This is a rhetorical move found, for instance, in the work of Jacques Ellul, a French philosopher whose body of work rejects the influence of modern technology on education. In *The Technological Bluff*, Ellul claims that *technique* "is a thing of the present and looks to the future. It gradually effaces its own past."³⁰ For Ellul, "technique" refers to both the objects of technology and the sectors of culture that produce and maintain them. Because of its temporal limitations, technology "is not at all concerned about the meaning of life, and it rejects any relation to values."³¹ More insidious still, reliance on technology results in an erosion of meaning itself, considering technique "cannot give meaning to life nor give insight into new values."³² I argue that Ellul's position reverses the terms of the effacement: technological objects (like Caxton's books) self-evidently demonstrate the

³⁰ Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 17.

³¹ Ellul, *The Technological Bluff*, 148.

³² *Ibid*, 148.

productive tensions of their relationships to the past, whereas it is critiques of technology like Ellul's and Newman's that efface their own deeply rooted debts to mediation. When technology becomes abstracted from its material instances, it loses its connection to the history of encounters between mind and information. This has conditioned the way technology enters discussions about higher education. Newman's relationship to technology may be the one that took root and grew to define the modern university, but it is Caxton's that we need in the digital age.

To explore this metaphorical rendering of technology, I turn to the year 1869, which saw the publication of two works that set rhetorical poles for discussions of the future of higher education: Matthew Arnold's essays on culture and learning collected as *Culture and Anarchy*, and Charles W. Eliot's "The New Education." At the start of the preface of *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold (b.1822 – d.1888), an English literary and cultural critic, frames a relationship between learning and technology premised on the kind of effacement initiated by Newman. The metaphor of mechanics stands in for an environment of degraded learning. At the end of the preface, Arnold explicitly links this degraded learning to that which is developing in American colleges and universities. In February of the same year, Charles W. Eliot (b.1834 – d.1926), an American academic and university president, penned an essay in *The Atlantic* describing the gulf between the historical legacy of colleges and universities in America (the cultivation of gentlemen) and the changing needs of the present, involving new and evolving fields of study, technical proficiencies, and diverse career pathways. These essays set the stage for the public vision of higher education in the twentieth century as a tension between the ideals of the life of the mind and the practical realities of material knowledge and training.

In the preface to *Culture and Anarchy*, Matthew Arnold outlines his understanding of culture and its relationship to processes of teaching and learning as well as to the organization of

schools. In one of his more famous formulations, Arnold defines culture as “a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world.”³³ Arnold’s phrase “the best which has been thought and said in the world” has endured beyond his book by shaping the way we frame the work of higher learning, especially higher learning in the humanities.³⁴ The phrase evokes the process by which the Western tradition of philosophy and literature is shaped into a canon of works with interrelationships communicated in time. “The best which has been thought and said in the world” establishes continuity between people and ideas, but it does so without explicitly acknowledging the objects that facilitate and contain those encounters. The problem is not entirely with Arnold, who understandably saw utility in maintaining exposure to the great works. The problem is that readers often ignore the rest of the sentence: “...and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically.”³⁵ Arnold, like Newman, relies on the metaphor of mechanism to establish a binary between authentic and artificial knowledge production.

Arnold recognizes the need to shake up “our stock notions and habits,” those established practices and procedures for teaching, learning, and communicating knowledge. But troubling is

³³ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: an Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder & Co.: 1869), viii.

³⁴ One particularly forceful iteration of this influence occurs in Toby Miller’s *Blow Up The Humanities*, from 2012. Arnold’s thought becomes emblematic of “Humanities One,” which Miller defines as the traditional legacy of shaping the “whole person” and the conventional influence of the liberal arts. For Miller, Humanities One is “banal Arnoldian training” and “nostalgic class parthenogenesis.” Toby Miller, *Blow Up the Humanities* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), Kindle edition, loc. 1224.

³⁵ Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, viii.

how easily Arnold deploys the metaphor of mechanical industry to blanket-critique those established practices. Despite the fact that in 1869 any contact with “the best” of literary history would be negotiated in the pages of printed books, Arnold associates the mechanical and technological processes needed to produce those encounters with at best uninspired thinking and, at worst, “mischief.” In Arnold, following Newman, industry becomes a metaphor. When the mind operates mechanically, or when old habits are followed mechanically, no *true* intellectual work is possible. In these formulations, the modality of technology is adopted as a foil, treated with suspicion or outright hostility, and the reality of its mediation is erased. The irony is that Arnold even reinforces the importance of reading (“a man’s life of each day depends for its solidity and value on whether he reads during that day, and, far more still, on what he reads during it”), a practice entirely dependent on mediations between people and ideas made possible by technological objects.³⁶ Arnold’s vision of learning, like Newman’s, desires the containment function of books, their capacity to store information in time, but ignores the levels of technological mediation required to produce it.

With its foundation in material mediation of knowledge effaced, technology is free to become a symbol for industrial and corporatist modes of economic and social organization infringing on the mission of culture and higher education. Arnold worries about a loss of “culture” in England as a result of “our worship of machinery, and of external doing.”³⁷ This phrase critiques not only the cultural patterns driving industrial production spreading across the developed world in the 19th century, but also the larger and less well defined category of “external doing.” The benefits of technological mediation are eclipsed by concerns over the expansion of education and the life of the mind beyond purely conceptual play. Arnold’s

³⁶ *Ibid*, ix.

³⁷ *Ibid*, x.

association of machinery with “external doing” stands in contrast to his definition of culture’s flexibility, which facilitates “an inward working.”³⁸ While Arnold is critical of his own nation for its worship of industry, he locates America as the site of real cultural erosion via mechanism. Beyond being “without general intelligence,” Arnold finds in the Puritan roots of American higher education a curious historical analogy: when established and institutionalized religion overtakes more general forms of spiritualism, the resulting rigidity “leaves Hebraism rampant in us and Hellenism stamped out.”³⁹ For Arnold, the restrictions on “fresh and free” ideas presented by religious or moral instruction activates the legislative Judeo-Christian codes embedded in American culture and resists the ideal of free inquiry, science, and philosophy emblemized by ancient Greece. Thus ritual and mechanism collude in American education to delimit the growth of culture, and thus higher education remains unable to unlock continuity with “the best.”

Arnold’s vision of American education looks backward to the colonial and revolutionary periods, where higher education meant the cultivation of gentlemanly conduct. But by the time of his writing, American higher learning was already looking forward to the scientific breakthroughs and technological advancements of the period after the Civil War, as institutions increasingly took on the shape and scope of the emergent German research university. Just as Arnold was characterizing American educational culture in the terms of the past, Charles W. Eliot was asking questions about its future. Eliot was an influential president of Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, seeing the university through the transition from gentleman’s training to world-class research institution. In “The New Education,” an essay published by *The Atlantic* magazine in February 1869, Eliot begins with a very personal question: “what can I do

³⁸ *Ibid*, lvii.

³⁹ *Ibid*, xxx, xxxiii.

with my boy?”⁴⁰ Eliot refers to his son’s future education, and the confrontation between the types of training historically associated with colleges and the needs of a changing American industrial landscape:

I can afford, and am glad, to give him the best training to be had. I should be proud to have him turn out a preacher or a learned man; but I don’t think he has the making of that in him. I want to give him a practical education; one that will prepare him, better than I was prepared, to follow my business or any other active calling. The classical schools and the colleges do not offer what I want. Where can I put him? Here is a real need and a very serious problem.⁴¹

Eliot expresses a moment of uncertainty in the history of American higher education.

Traditionally, “clergy” and “scholar” were the outputs of higher learning. But Eliot outlines the absence of alternate paths of higher study producing different career outputs, a problem of limitation. He casts such limitation as un-American. As Eliot writes later, “the American people are fighting the wilderness, physical and moral, on the one hand, and on the other are struggling to work out the awful problem of self-government” – thus American institutions of higher learning must be able to serve a wider constituency than their European counterparts, in which “government leading-strings or social prescriptions” limit individual choice.⁴² Eliot resists the cleave toward rarified air present in Newman and Arnold.

Charles W. Eliot surveys the world around him and sees change: “the same methods which trained some boys well for the life of fifty or one hundred years ago” are no longer

⁴⁰ Charles W. Eliot, “The New Education,” *The Atlantic*, February 27, 1869, http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1869/02/the-new-education/309049/?single_page=true.

⁴¹ Eliot, “The New Education.”

⁴² *Ibid.*

applicable because “the kind of man which he wants his son to make did not exist in all the world fifty years ago.”⁴³ In America, the monopoly on higher education exerted by the colonial and revolutionary colleges was disrupted by the passing of the Morrill Act of 1862, which paved the way for the land-grant colleges, institutions emphasizing the study of agriculture and mechanical technology in addition to traditional liberal study. Land-grant institutions jumpstarted an era of American educational dominance in science and engineering. America thus legislated the very cultural forces Arnold laments in *Culture and Anarchy*. Eliot recognizes the potential in this expanded landscape for learners like his son, interested in both the life of the mind and the work of the hand, and his vision for higher learning in America directly challenges the conceptual transcendence and of Newman’s idea for the university, expressed just a few years earlier. And indeed, during Eliot’s tenure, Harvard rewrote the DNA of the American university toward these practical ends, allowing American higher education to finally grow “out of the soil.”⁴⁴ The Morrill Act of 1862 (and its expansion in 1890) changed the trajectory of American higher education, moving it further from Arnold’s and toward Eliot’s vision.

Arnold and Eliot take positions regarding the mission of higher education on poles from the play of mind and information desired by Newman to vocational and career-driven professional training. But the reality of higher learning is somewhere in the middle. In a recent survey of American higher education, Roger Geiger recognizes that “college has always symbolized the acquisition of advanced knowledge, access to careers more or less connected

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* In “DNA,” I borrow from the work of Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring, who’s *The Innovative University* argues that issues of cost and quality in higher education “are produced not by mistake or happenstance but by design. The roots of the problems are genetic, and the DNA is fundamentally Harvard’s.” Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring, *The Innovative University* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 197.

with such knowledge, and the assimilation of middle- or upper-middle-class culture.”⁴⁵ Geiger’s trifecta (knowledge, career, and culture) suggests a synthetic relationship between the cultural and financial capital of the university, one that recognizes the capacity for technology to engage both the forces of the market and the ideals of inquiry in the liberal arts. Perception is key, though, and often obscures balance. Because professional training grounded in material technologies has proven more profitable in the short term for individuals due to clearer career prospects immediately upon graduation, and more profitable for institutions in the long term via grant money, patents, and potential alumni donations, university administrations gravitate toward programs providing it. Thus, from the perspective of the humanities educator, industry, technology, and administration collude to erode the legacy of liberal learning and thus the historical mission of higher education.

Technological mediation, as I have been arguing, has worked with disciplinary knowledge to condition our understanding of teaching, learning, and the life of the mind. This happens despite the effacements presented by definitions of the “idea” of the university. In the last two decades, as digital immersion has reshaped entire sectors of culture and industry, technological mediation in higher education has become dramatically more visible. Presuming that its increased presence in undergraduate education means advocating for managerial or corporate aims for learning and career preparation runs the risk of continuing the erasure of technological mediation from the core knowledge operations of the university. The interfaces and practices of the digital age are read wrongly when they are built up as a boundary between yesterday’s knowledge and today’s. What prevents proper reflection on the varying degrees of continuity and discontinuity in the history of technological mediation is the rhetoric of crisis,

⁴⁵ Roger Geiger, *The History of American Higher Education: Learning and Culture from the Founding to World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), ix.

which permeates visions of the future of higher education. At times, this rhetoric is matter of fact (“public higher education is in crisis – and it has been for some time”), at times it is hortatory (“if you work in a college or university or if you just read the newspapers, you cannot escape the impression that higher education is going to hell in a handbasket”).⁴⁶ Crisis is real (“while the drivers for change in the university sector and associated debates have existed for some time, there is an undoubted increasing cadence in the discussion”), but also mythically self-sustaining, “fueled in part by the rhetoric of crisis itself.”⁴⁷ Crisis emerges as a narrative repository, a staging area for arguments about the university of the past, the current enterprise of higher education, and its potential mutations in the future.

Two important vectors of the crisis narrative are mission drift and enrollment decline in the core humanities disciplines. These disciplines (like languages, literature, history, philosophy) often emblemize the aspects of colleges and universities that most closely embrace the lineage of the historical liberal arts described in Caxton’s *The Mirrour of the World*. Louis Menand, for instance, finds the humanities disciplines “dislocated” and “institutionally insecure” because they have lost their “philosophical roots,” a mission drift that traces insecurity through a “crisis of rationale” to “crises of funding.”⁴⁸ The health of the humanistic disciplines is posited as an index for the overall health of the historical project of higher education. But despite denotations of

⁴⁶ Matthew T. Lambert, *Privatization and the Public Good* (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2014), 9; Jeffrey J. Williams, *How to Be an Intellectual: Essays on Criticism, Culture, and the University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 119.

⁴⁷ Alain Bain and Lucia Zundans-Fraser, *Rising to the Challenge of Transforming Higher Education: Designing Universities for Learning and Teaching*, Springer Briefs in Education (Springer, 2016), v; Paul Jay, *The Humanities ‘Crisis’ and the Future of Literary Studies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1.

⁴⁸ Louis Menand, *The Marketplace of Ideas*, American Council of Learned Societies, Occasional Paper No. 49, 2001, http://archives.acsls.org/op/49_Marketplace_of_Ideas.htm.

immediacy, narratives of crisis themselves are not new, and certainly not unique to the digital age. In 1978, Byrum Carter wrote

the humanities, if we are to believe their academic spokesmen, are in trouble. They are plagued by declining student enrollments, a surplus of PhDs, a skeptical public, a sense of uncertainty as to mission, and a decline in available money. Dire predictions are made as to their future, and cries arise for assistance in meeting the ‘crisis’ that confronts humanistic scholarship.⁴⁹

These words could just as easily have been written today. The issue stretches further back in time as well. In *Community of Learning*, Francis Oakley traces the history of crisis to the earliest educational initiatives of the West, finding “a markedly tension-ridden and conflicted” history: “only if we overlook that cardinal fact are we likely to be tempted to play off the educational turmoil of the present against the supposed serenity of the past.”⁵⁰ The “serenity of the past” is a fiction deployed to ground critiques of the present, a rhetorical move I have already outlined in my discussion of the erasure of technological mediation from the history of the life of the mind. But it is a fiction with profound reach and influence.

The rhetoric of crisis relies, in part, on the perception that the core humanistic disciplines that form the legacy of the liberal arts are in a period of dramatic enrollment decline. Take for instance a *Wall Street Journal* article by Jennifer Levitz and Douglas Belkin from 2013, “Humanities Fall From Favor.” The essay presented data for what appeared to be a precipitous fall in the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded in the humanities. One visualization, sourced from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was alarming: “Decline and Fall” shows time

⁴⁹ Byrum E. Carter, “Much Ado about Little? The Crisis in the Humanities,” *Change* 10, no. 3 (1978): 35.

⁵⁰ Francis Oakley, *Community of Learning: The American College and the Liberal Arts Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 41.

on the x-axis, 1970 to 2010, and percentage of humanities bachelor's degrees on the y-axis, on a scale of 0 to 20. At the 1970 position, the graph records its highest percentage, above 17%. Through the middle 1980s, the percentage falls rapidly, bottoming at about 6%, and then stabilizing, recording 7.6% at the 2010 position.⁵¹ The graph visually conveys a sharp decline. But in a blog post for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, researcher Ben Schmidt complicates this representation. Schmidt worked on the AAAS "Humanities Indicators" project that produced the graph, and claims that by starting the trace in the period right around 1970, this visualization misrepresents an outlying bubble as a stable benchmark. Schmidt goes back further in time and uncovers the other half of the story: the period around 1970 was one of peak enrollment in the humanities disciplines. Schmidt draws on additional data that show the percentage of humanities degrees in the 1950s hovering around 10%, climbing to the 17% peak through the 1960s, and then starting to fall during the 1970s.⁵² While the lived experience of the humanities educator is marked by feelings of fluctuation and loss, over this longer course of time the national trend in humanities degree conferrals suggests stability.

This sense of stability is reinforced by another set of numbers aggregated by data analyst Nate Silver. In an article for the *New York Times*, Silver looks at historical enrollment data a different way. The percentage of new bachelor's degrees awarded in English was 3.1 in 2011, down from 7.6% in 1971. But, as Silver notes, when we consider the percentage of English BAs as a proportion of the total college-age population, "the decline is much less distinct. In 2011, 1.1 out of every 100 21-year-olds graduated with a bachelor's degree in English, down only

⁵¹ Jennifer Levitz and Douglas Belkin, "Humanities Fall From Favor," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2013,

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324069104578527642373232184>.

⁵² Ben Schmidt, "A Crisis in the Humanities?," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 10, 2013, <http://www.chronicle.com/blognetwork/edgeofthewest/2013/06/10/the-humanities-crisis/>.

incrementally from 1.2 in 2001 and 1.3 in 1991.”⁵³ Importantly, Silver draws attention to trends beyond the humanities. Mathematics, statistics and the social sciences all experience percentage drops between 1970 and today, and even engineering experienced only modest gains (1.2 degrees per 21-year-old in 1971, 1.7 in 2011). The real growth areas are health, business, and other professional degrees. Dramatic growth in these latter categories contributes to the felt effects of decline in the humanities relative to the overall higher education landscape. There will be variation in each of these figures across individual sectors of higher education, across individual colleges and universities, and across geographic areas. Colleges and universities will have experiences unique and perhaps more dramatic than this national picture allows. Whether or not the numbers support the claim, there is a *felt effect* of the erosion of the historically core disciplines of higher learning, and that feeling fuels the rhetoric of crisis. This rhetoric provides an opportunity, a conduit for existing narratives of nostalgia and progress, that maps onto broader dynamics of mediation and higher learning as exemplified by John Henry Newman’s *The Idea of a University* and William Caxton’s *The Mirrour of the World*.

Another vector of the “crisis” more self-evidently dramatic is the shifting patterns of public funding for higher education. Matthew Lambert writes that as “higher education has been steadily redefined in the public mind as yielding mainly private benefits” as opposed to working toward the public good, colleges and universities experience an “erosion of support from state legislatures.”⁵⁴ Take, for example, “Federal and State Funding of Higher Education,” an issue brief published by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 2015. In the wake of the 2008 economic recession, federal revenue per full-time equivalent student filtering to higher education surpassed

⁵³ Nate Silver, “As More Attend College, Majors Become More Career Focused,” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2013, http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/25/as-more-attend-college-majors-become-more-career-focused/?_r=0.

⁵⁴ Lambert, *Privatization*, 89.

state revenue for the first time in decades. Across the period 2000 to 2012, state revenue per full-time equivalent student fell from over \$7,000 to just over \$4,000, while federal funding increased from just under \$4,000 to over \$5,000. For 2013, state and federal revenue made up 37% of public college and university budgets (21% state, 16% federal).⁵⁵ Further, in “State Funding: A Race to the Bottom,” published in 2012, Thomas G. Mortensen predicts that by the year 2059, if current trends remain, state appropriations for higher education will approach zero. The process is already underway, with state funding down 40% overall in the period 1980 to 2011. One result of this shift in funding structures is a dramatic rise in tuition: 247% at state flagships, adjusted for inflation, according to Mortensen.⁵⁶ As the public perception of higher education increasingly shifts toward a private good (career preparation, socio-economic growth, etc.), it carries along with it implications of market-driven neoliberal politics.⁵⁷ Accordingly, state legislatures decrease public funding for the entire enterprise resulting in a shift of the burden onto the federal government in the form of increasing need-based aid, and onto individual students and their families in the form of out-of-pocket expenses.

⁵⁵ “Federal and State Funding of Higher Education: A Changing Landscape,” Issue Brief, *The Pew Charitable Trusts*, June 11, 2015, <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2015/06/federal-and-state-funding-of-higher-education>.

⁵⁶ Thomas G. Mortensen, “State Funding: A Race to the Bottom,” *American Council on Education*, Winter (2012), <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/state-funding-a-race-to-the-bottom.aspx>.

⁵⁷ One effect of these shifts is the growth of the managerial organizational structure within the “administrative university,” a trend Benjamin Ginsberg outlines in his book *The Fall of the Faculty*. Across the period 1975-2005, Ginsberg cites wildly differing rates of growth for different positions within the university ecosystem: +51% for full-time faculty, +85% for administrative positions, and +240% for “other professionals,” a class that includes information technology professionals and other para-instructional staff positions. Despite the increased need for such professionals on technologically-infused campuses, the story Ginsberg tells is one of a shift from “new visions of society” to a “knowledge factory.” Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All-Administrative University and Why It Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 25, 3.

The shifting makeup of colleges and universities from the teaching and learning of the liberal arts to career training facilitated by corporate administration and para-instructional staffing contributes to fears over a loss of mission and becomes a scapegoat for enrollment declines. As Jeffrey J. Williams puts it, educators face shifts in “the idea” of higher education “from a public entitlement to a private service,” “from a social good to an individual good,” and “from youthful exemption to market conscription.”⁵⁸ I argue that undergirding these feelings of anxiety and drift is a fundamental friction created as the legacy of the enterprise of higher learning encounters the radically changing conditions of its interactions with educators, students, and the public across technological interfaces. Technology is posited by some as an answer to the paradox presented by needing to educate more students with less money, an argument in alignment with the dramatic rise in enrollments in online courses and degree programs. More students than ever are enrolling in institutions of higher learning, and increasingly they are doing some, or all, of their study online.

Growth in online learning outpaces overall growth in higher education. In *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman provide useful comparative data on enrollment growth in online courses and degree programs. Total enrollments across higher education between 2002 and 2012 grew from about 16.6 million to about 21.3 million, an annual growth rate of 2.5%. During that same period, the number of students taking at least one online course grew from about 1.6 million to about 7.1 million, a compound annual growth rate of 16.1%. As a percentage of total enrollments, the percentage of students enrolled in at least one online course grew from 9.6% to 33.5%.⁵⁹ Despite trends

⁵⁸ Williams, *How to be an Intellectual*, 125-127.

⁵⁹ I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States* (Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group LLC, 2014), 15.

moving upward, when online growth outpaces overall growth, it generates a crisis of its own. In a related study, *Grade Level: Tracking Online Education in the United States*, Allen and Seaman note that only 25-35% of Chief Academic Officers surveyed between 2002 and 2014 could say “faculty at my school accept the value and legitimacy of online education.”⁶⁰ Visibility and exposure to online courses and degree program offerings go a long way to mitigating this concern. At colleges and universities with courses and degree programs online, more than 35% of CAOs could respond that faculty accept “the value and legitimacy of online education” – for CAOs at institutions without online degree programs this number falls to just over 20%, at institutions with no online offerings, below 10%.

What’s worse, however, is the emotional component to resistance to technological shifts in the practices and procedures of teaching and higher learning. The rhetoric of fear shows up in the research literature as a gauge for the developing relationship between educators and technology. A recent example is the study *Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education 2012*, published by *Inside Higher Ed* and the Babson Survey Research Group. The study surveyed faculty and administrators, finding that 57.7% of surveyed faculty felt “more fear than excitement” about online education, whereas 42.3% felt “more excitement than fear.”⁶¹ It is further proof of the increasing divide between faculty and administration that the corresponding figures for surveyed administrators were 19.8% and 80.2%, respectively.⁶² Higher education has traditionally understood duration in time as a measurement of value, divorced from the grounding of technological mediations, thus privileging continuity with established protocol.

⁶⁰ I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, *Grade Level: Tracking Online Education in the United States* (Babson Survey Research Group and Quahog Research Group LLC, 2015), 21.

⁶¹ I. Elaine Allen, Jeff Seaman, Doug Lederman, and Scott Jaschik, *Conflicted: Faculty and Online Education 2012* (*Inside Higher Ed* and the Babson Survey Research Group, 2012), 5.

⁶² Allen et. al., *Conflicted*, 5.

When changing conditions, practices, and institutional organizations challenge these protocols, the lack of precedent and unknown implications produce fear in addition to friction.

Correspondingly, the levels of fear among those who have taught an online course is lower, with more than 65% of faculty expressing “more excitement than fear.”⁶³ Another *Inside Higher Ed* study, *Faculty Attitudes on Technology* from 2014, measured responses to the proposition “for-credit online courses can achieve student learning outcomes that are at least equivalent to those of in-person courses.” The survey found that out of all faculty surveyed, only 9% could “strongly agree,” while 27% could “strongly disagree.”⁶⁴ When broken down by experience with online teaching and learning, the numbers are more revealing. For faculty who have never taught an online course, only 4% strongly agreed while 35% strongly disagreed with the proposition.

Whereas for faculty who have taught at least one online course, 19% strongly agreed versus only 11% who strongly disagreed.⁶⁵ These patterns reveal a deeply rooted hesitation with the conduct of higher education in online environments largely independent of any evidence about it or experience with it.

These trends expose conflict: the faster online education and technological integration expands, the more acutely aware institutions of higher learning are of questions surrounding quality, consistency, and legacy. The pace of enrollment growth in online classes and programs does not match the enthusiasm or comfort of faculty. Advocates for technology cite the reduction of cost and the increase in personalization and efficiency, but these claims are not solid enough

⁶³ *Ibid*, 7.

⁶⁴ Carl Straumsheim, Scott Jaschik and Doug Lederman, *Faculty Attitudes on Technology* (Gallup and *Inside Higher Ed*, 2015), 14. This statistic reveals a common prejudice with respect to online learning outcomes, despite the fact that there is a long history of research suggesting that there is “no significant difference” in outcomes based on the modality of course delivery. See Thomas L. Russell, *The No Significant Difference Phenomenon as Reported in 355 Research Reports, Summaries, and Papers* (Raleigh: North Carolina State University Press, 1999).

⁶⁵ Straumsheim, Jaschik, and Lederman, *Faculty Attitudes*, 14.

yet to overcome the many barriers to fuller and more confident integration of online learning platforms into the traditional institutions of higher education.⁶⁶ Technological innovation and integration exposes the anxiety about encounters between the past and the future that fuels the narratives of crisis inflected in stories of enrollment decline, mission drift, and the corporatization of the university that lies in the wake of eroded public funding. Education innovation is often wrapped up in this rhetorical package. The media coverage of MOOCs, beginning in earnest in 2012, supports this narrative. Across 2012 and the years following it, it would have been easy to think that Silicon Valley had suddenly gained control over higher learning by incubating a small cluster of companies offering massive free courses that would mutate the DNA of higher education through claims to open access, democratization, and customization. The effect of this coverage is twofold: first, it ignores how integrated technology already is in the teaching and learning at most colleges and universities (email, learning management systems, electronic submission, digital portfolio creation, etc.); second, it fulfills the worst fears of the technologically-skeptical, closely associating educational technology with the most visible incarnation of neoliberal capitalism in the 21st century: startup culture. Technology

⁶⁶ William Bowen and the researchers at the Ithaka S+R group are at the forefront of these research questions. A 2012 study “Interactive Learning Online at Public Universities: Evidence from Randomized Trials” compared student learning outcomes in comparable face-to-face and hybrid course, finding “no statistically significant differences” between the two, the implication being that the hybrid sections could reduce cost and improve productivity over time. William G. Bowen, Matthew M. Chingos, Kelly A. Lack, Thomas I. Nygren, “Interactive Learning Online at Public Universities,” *Ithaka S+R* (2012). In another Ithaka S+R study, though, “Barriers to Adoption of Online Learning in American Higher Education,” researchers found faculty resistance to online learning environments on the grounds of concerns over job security, novelty, and ownership of intellectual materials. Lawrence S. Bacow, William G. Bowen, Kevin M. Guthrie, Kelly A. Lack, Matthew P. Long, “Barriers to Adoption of Online Learning in American Higher Education,” *Ithaka S+R* (2012). These studies lead Bowen to conclude, in *Higher Education in the Digital Age*, that “online learning...can lead to at least comparable learning outcomes relative to face-to-face instruction at lower cost.” William Bowen, *Higher Education in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 45.

acts as a fulcrum, flanked by narratives of nostalgia that privilege traditional models of authentic knowledge production and narratives of progress that leverage innovation toward reform.

On either side of the technological fault line, narratives of nostalgia and progress fail to acknowledge the historical arc of technological mediation as a conditioning factor in the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge in institutions of higher learning. Again the logic of the book is instructive. In the epilogue to his 1484 edition of Ramon Llull's thirteenth-century *The Order of Chyualry*, William Caxton confronts readers with a powerful synthesis of nostalgia and progress as a response to the perception of crisis. Knights in the England of Caxton's day have lost their connection to the lineage of their chivalrous code: "thexcerfjytes of chyualry" are "not vjled / honoured / ne excercyfed / as hit hath ben in auntyent tyme" (sig. g.i^v).⁶⁷ Caxton links his book to this history, a place where the past is "wreton" even as the practices it supposedly contained are "forgeten" by the actions of contemporary knights, who are more likely to "go to the baynes [and] playe atte dylle" than find glory in battle (sig. g.i^v, sig. g.ii^r). But even as he aligns the book with the authority of the past, Caxton reminds his readers of the necessity of mediation in the present. He calls on knights to "leue this" behavior, "leue it and rede the noble volumes of fayne graal of lancelot / of galaad / of Tryftram," volumes which Caxton would himself print only a year later in his edition of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (sig. g.ii^r). The readerly encounter between the knight and the book transmutes the lost practices of the past into the cultivation of chivalric values in the present. *The Order of Chyualry* trades on the symbolic authority in the lineage of chivalry but grounds that authority in the emergent technological mediations of the present. In the English vernacular printed book, narratives of nostalgia and progress converge. In the following section, the synthesis marked by

⁶⁷ Ramon Llull and William Caxton, *The Ordre of Chyualry*, Westminster: 1484. STC 3356.7. University of California Libraries, *HathiTrust*.

Caxton's humanist books guides my efforts to trace the vectors of nostalgia and progress that shape the contemporary discourse on the future of higher education.

The New "Two Cultures": Nostalgia and Progress

The MOOC hype of 2012 provided a platform for the amplification of voices attempting to articulate the core mission of higher education, often tied to its roots as an educational vehicle for the "whole person" defined within a pre-industrial pre-informational frame of reference. MOOCs have drawn out deep-seated anxieties latent in the shifting landscape of higher education. The perception of higher education as a "bureaucratic assignment of skill capacity," in Michael Roth's terms, confronts its legacy as "an intellectual and experiential adventure."⁶⁸ To borrow a phrase from Jeffrey R. Young, when the "Age of Digital Instruction" with its "jetpack moments" meets administrators eager to find new revenue streams, it is easy to lose sight of the mission of higher education as it has been historically defined.⁶⁹ The perceived collusion of

⁶⁸ Michael S. Roth, *Beyond the University: Why Liberal Education Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 8. Robert Zemsky, Gregory R. Wegner, and William F. Massy attempt to harmonize these two positions by encouraging colleges and universities to be "market-smart" in order to "remain mission-centered," but this is a difficult task. Robert Zemsky, Gregory R. Wegner, William F. Massy, *Remaking the American University* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9. Christopher Newfield's position is more dire: "the university's cultural missions have declined at the same time as leaders in politics, economics, and the media have lost much of their capacity to understand the world in noneconomic terms." Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 14.

⁶⁹ Jeffrey R. Young, *Beyond the MOOC Hype (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013)*, Kindle edition, loc. 862, 46. As James Côté and Anton Allahar put it, "as universities adopt teaching practices associated with *training* people to remember formulae, systems of facts, and procedures, rather than *educating* them to develop a critical awareness of the world at large that they can defend epistemologically," the basic "structure and function" of the university shifts. James E. Côté and Anton L. Allahar, *Lowering Higher Education: The Rise of Corporate Universities and The Fall of Liberal Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 4.

technology and vested corporate interest produces far-reaching effects in higher education, and exposes a raw nerve at the center of the enterprise. C.P. Snow's original "two cultures" were separated by a gulf of disciplinary knowledge between the sciences and the humanities. I argue that in the digital age, when narratives of nostalgia and narratives of progress fail to acknowledge their shared history of technological mediation in the transactions of knowledge involved in higher learning, they create a new kind of gulf. Using Caxton and Newman's lineages to reposition the history of technology within the larger idealizations of the university draws these sides back toward synthesis in the service of meaningful learning.

The formulation of crisis as a cultural rift between narratives of nostalgia and narratives of progress opens opportunities to explore the legacy of technological mediation as it has shaped not only practices of teaching and learning but also the way actors outside of higher education reflect on and communicate the conditions of those practices. At the center of this fissure is the value of physical presence and an anxiety over the replacement of the "relational teacher with a disembodied machine," as Laura Harrison and Peter Mather put it.⁷⁰ Such replacement challenges Newman's free play of mind and information while at the same time works toward a recovery of the inherent technological mediation at the heart of knowledge production – the logic of the book – as it influences institutions through time. Recognizing this continuity mitigates the anxiety over replacement and reconfigures the relationship between the changing interfaces and platforms that condition learning and the teaching practices inherited from the history of higher learning. If "the outputs of higher education (both research and graduates) are the inputs of other industries," as Robert Archibald and David Feldman claim, then higher education must not only

⁷⁰ Harrison and Mather, *Alternative Solutions*, 141.

reflect the changing nature of those industries but indeed must itself help to shape them.⁷¹ In this section, I elaborate on narratives of nostalgia and progress in contemporary visions of higher education to show that carrying the legacy of higher learning forward into the digital age requires that teachers and learners not efface their own mediated history. Caxton's *Mirroure* and *Order* teach that the accumulated knowledge of the past and the innovative mediations of the present can coexist in energetic exchange through the form of the book. Newman's *The Idea of a University* models a particularly suspicious response to such exchange. Reconciling progress and nostalgia means acknowledging that technological mediation today, as it has in the past, signals opportunity rather than threat.

On one side of the technological fault line are narratives of nostalgia, drawing on the tradition of critique of the “mechanization” of teaching and learning as exemplified by Newman and Matthew Arnold above. On the other, narratives of progress, drawing on the energy produced at the intersection of technological innovation and educational practice as exemplified by Caxton and Charles Eliot. Educational technologies and the challenges they pose to practices of teaching and learning have proven themselves balance-breaking propositions on both sides. Confronted by change, the natural reaction is to reach out and grab something stable. For higher education, this has historically meant reconnecting with the past, manifested as tradition and precedent. But what happens, more often than not, is not a proper return but an attempt to draw the past forward, reactivating it in the conditions of the present. Conversely, futurists who embrace change do so at a pace incommensurate with thresholds of comfort and reasonable reflection, attempting to fashion the future in the present, absent the context of the past. The friction produced fuels the crisis felt in both narratives of nostalgia and progress. Narratives of

⁷¹ Robert Archibald and David Feldman, *Why Does College Cost So Much?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77.

nostalgia privilege physical presence as a precondition for meaningful knowledge production between teacher and student. Narratives of progress, by contrast, emphasize a dispersal of presence in the form of the unbundling of institutions, allowing customizable relationships between teachers, students, and content. In these two registers, nostalgia and progress variously define the role presence plays in the production and dissemination of knowledge.

Reasserting the role of technological mediation in the historical production of knowledge, as I have begun to do in this chapter, invites educators to unify these different resonances of presence in the contemporary educational moment. In 1998, David Noble published “Digital Diploma Mills,” an essay sharply critical of technology in education. Noble’s concern was that technology will draw “the halls of academe into the age of automation” where students find themselves subject to “cyber-counterfeit,” the erosion of the value they invest in higher learning, and “in ten years, we will look upon the wired remains of our once great democratic higher education system.”⁷² Noble’s rhetoric is useful for understanding the anxiety about presence and technology. First, it locates the anxiety over technological integration in the growing use of automation, a process by which discrete tasks are removed from conscious thought or action and rendered mechanically replicable. Second, it extrapolates from the growth of automation the decline of democracy, a political system grounded in the physical presence of a heterogeneous body of citizens. Noble’s critique is built upon an anxiety about presence, and the assumption is that as technological integration increases, presence decreases. His argument exemplifies what I call the *digital presence fallacy*, the presumption that, *a priori*, digital spaces cannot host presence or foster intimate and meaningful teaching and learning encounters by virtue of the fact

⁷² David Noble, “Digital Diploma Mills,” *First Monday*, 3, no. 1 (1998), <http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/569/490>.

that they are not physical. The digital presence fallacy emerges as a recurring factor conditioning narratives of nostalgia.

For an emblematic example of this formulation of presence, I turn to Jeffrey R. Docking's 2015 book *Crisis in Higher Education*. Docking has been the president of Adrian College in Michigan since 2005, and *Crisis* lays out a plan to save small liberal arts colleges like his in clear steps, but not without first mounting a critique of one of the perceived threats to residential liberal arts campuses, online education:

Online education is disengaged education; it is education that places students in front of a computer screen instead of in front of a professor and mentor. It is education directed at the head at the expense of the heart, at the mind at the expense of the soul, at the individual at the expense of the expense of the community. I have taken online classes, and I encourage presidents and admissions administrators to try to find an online course that can replicate the experience our students receive in small, on-campus classes. You will discover that these classes and experiences do not exist. While they are convenient and often less expensive, convenience does not translate into knowledge production.⁷³

Docking's prose engages with questions of digital presence in three ways: first, that replacement equals loss; second, that a division between heart and mind circumscribes education; third, that replication is the goal of online education. First, it argues that the replacement of teacher by screen necessarily triggers a loss. This argument relies on an idealized notion of teacher-student contact in the classroom, and misrepresents the importance of presence. The premise that a screen somehow erodes the value of the professor it projects presumes that teachers and students

⁷³ Jeffrey R. Docking with Carman C. Curton, *Crisis in Higher Education: A Plan to Save Small Liberal Arts Colleges in America* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 26.

will have meaningful interactions simply by sharing the same physical space, on the one hand, and presumes no active professorial hand in the design of what the screen delivers, on the other. Docking's claim about meaningful interactions in physical space ignores the mediating factors of building design, room layout, and course format, each of which impacts the negotiations of teaching and learning in powerful, if often unregistered ways. Restricting environments of learning to physical spaces requiring substantial financial and cultural expenditures ignores the reality of the college experience for most of America's approximately twenty-one million undergraduates.

Second, the argument posits a fundamental dichotomy between body and soul, a strategy in line with much of Western theology and metaphysics but out of touch with developments in neural networking, cognitive science, and pedagogical theory. Recall that Caxton has no issue using his book, a mass-produced technological object, to set down and disseminate the knowledge produced in those disciplines that were liberal, that carried the soul back to God. While many liberal arts colleges depend upon the creation of what Rebecca Chopp calls "intentional community," the cultivation and curation of a particular body of students, faculty, and staff, physical facilities are not the only way to intentionally form community.⁷⁴ Participatory culture, especially as it is inflected in a post-Web 2.0 world, has opened up pathways for community formation and aggregation online impossible to imagine even two decades ago. In the digital age, computing is increasingly embodied as our digital expressions move from device to device, pocket to hand, no longer tethered to discrete wired interfaces. At a time of unprecedented interconnectedness, Docking's emphasis on a division between the

⁷⁴ Rebecca Chopp, "Remaking, Renewing, Reimagining," in *Remaking College: Innovation and the Liberal Arts*, ed. Rebecca Chopp, Susan Frost, Daniel H. Weiss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 21.

operations of mind, the embeddedness of body, and the cultivation of soul wears thin. If the goal of liberal arts education is to grow the “whole person,” such divisions only work to undermine it.

Third, the argument tacitly posits replication as the intended goal of online education. This is insidious. Teaching and learning can be successful or unsuccessful in any modality depending on the effectiveness of the teacher, the mindfulness of the course design, and the willingness of the students. Face-to-face teaching and learning is not always effective within its modality, and online education will of course be poor if the face-to-face models it replicates are poor. The best teaching and learning occurring in both physical and digital spaces takes advantage of the affordances of the environment, utilizing space to shape perception, communication, and knowledge production. The dichotomy between “online classes” and “small, on-campus classes” perpetuates the impression that the small, liberal arts experience is the core standard against which all other forms of higher education must be measured (akin to the “DNA of Harvard” model).⁷⁵ Instead, this is the outlier experience of a privileged few. Online education must set its scope wider if it is to develop the robust and diverse range of learning environments needed to serve American undergraduates in all disciplines. Pressuring it to conform to a model to which it was never meant to aspire distorts the utility of both in the academic marketplace. Docking’s critique of online education reads more like a lament for the perceived loss of tradition than an exploration of an emergent system, a hallmark of the narratives of nostalgia.

The implied necessity of physical presence between teacher and student exposed by Docking inflects the broader narratives of nostalgia I have proposed here. Mark Edmundson’s

⁷⁵ See note 44 above.

Why Teach? provides a striking example. Edmundson posits presence as the catalyst for the entire enterprise of higher learning:

When you have that kind of conversation, one on one, you begin, however modestly, to create a university. Why does the encounter need to take place face-to-face, rather than online? Because the student and teacher need to create a bond of good feeling, where they are free to speak openly with each other. They need to connect not just through cold print but through gestures, intonations, jokes.⁷⁶

Edmundson's prose provides a rich example of the benefits of presence. Emotional awareness, academic freedom, and personal expression are all tied to face-to-face presence, and each constitutes one form of connection that, in aggregate, "create a university." Edmundson puts "cold print" in contrast to the "bond of good feeling" generated by physical presence, associating textual media and the technologies that produce it with the impersonal. In *Why Read?*, another of Edmundson's books on higher education, he frames technology as even more insidious: "by putting a world of facts at the end of a key-stroke," technological mediation in the form of computing has suspended "reflection about the differences among wisdom, knowledge, and information," a quality Edmundson posits as "central to what now can qualify as humanistic education."⁷⁷ For Edmundson, the meaningful components of learning in a university setting are transmitted – or, perhaps less technologically speaking, grown – through the idiosyncrasies of physical interpersonal communication and contact ("gestures, intonations, jokes"). Mediation functions only to sever those connections or prevent them from forming.

The meaningful physical presence of teacher and student remains an idealization, and a relatively unachievable one, when considering the millions of undergraduates in America who

⁷⁶ Mark Edmundson, *Why Teach?* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 46.

⁷⁷ Mark Edmundson, *Why Read?*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 15.

are commuter students, who work part or full time during school, who have family commitments at home, or who otherwise cannot rely on the “bond of good feeling” they may never realize between themselves and the lecturer they see standing at a podium. But it is increasingly apparent that, as Kevin Guthrie suggests, “social networks” and other online communications platforms “offer new kinds of interaction that often serve as an effective complement to face-to-face communication and sometimes even as a substitute for those interactions.”⁷⁸ Guthrie’s point is important because it recognizes that digital mediation and access to networked systems is transacted by behaviors beyond mere consumption of facts. The Internet is as participatory as any other medium of teaching and learning, and perhaps more so in ways teachers and learners have yet to fully appreciate.⁷⁹ To claim only one metric of physical presence as the necessary germ of higher learning neglects the many different modalities and environments through which our minds can learn, not to mention the many and varied contingencies that condition access to and success in spaces of higher education. It also participates in the effacement of technological mediation as it has engaged people and objects in processes of knowledge production.

The importance of physical presence as a precondition for higher learning in the narratives of nostalgia is not isolated to interactions between teachers and students in office hours. Take, as an example, Anthony Aveni’s reaction to the prospect of online learning in *Class Not Dismissed*: “how do you assess online essays? How do you evaluate answers to complex questions that often incorporate subjective elements? How do you quantify feelings evoked by

⁷⁸ Kevin Guthrie, “You Can Run But You Can’t Hide,” in *Remaking College: Innovation and the Liberal Arts*, ed. Rebecca Chopp, Susan Frost, Daniel H. Weiss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 106.

⁷⁹ In *The Future of Thinking*, Cathy Davidson and David Theo Goldberg propose that we are still “learning how to be digital *together* and *digitally* together.” Cathy N. Davidson and David Theo Goldberg, *The Future of Thinking* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), 70.

poetry?”⁸⁰ Evaluating essays and quantifying the feelings evoked by poetry are tasks that challenge any educator anywhere, but Aveni frames them as problems, indeed barriers, introduced explicitly in environments mediated by technological interfaces. In online learning, Aveni finds cause for lament, the loss of the ideal, emblemized by his *ubi sunt* list of rhetorical questions. The educational tasks that Aveni identifies as impossible in the translation of educational environments from physical to digital spaces fit into the binary established by Andrew Delbanco in his discussion of online education Bowen’s *Higher Education in the Digital Age*: “I don’t think it is possible to overemphasize the distinction between instruction and provocation. It’s a distinction that can be restated in many ways: facts versus knowledge; skill versus wisdom; discipline versus inspiration; information versus insight.”⁸¹ The subtext of Aveni’s questions is that online education serves only instruction, facticity, skill, discipline, and information, that it is a poor guide through the “treacherous terrain” of “self-knowledge” as Delbanco puts it elsewhere.⁸² Aveni and Delbanco exemplify the kind of rhetorical strategies deployed in Newman’s “Discourse VI”: they draw the ideals of humanities education into alignment with the traditional mission of higher education, and carefully position technological mediation as an unfit interloper.

An important undercurrent informing the narratives of nostalgia is a sense that the life of the mind is antithetical to the life of the algorithm. As an example of this effect in practice, I turn to Frank Donoghue, in *The Last Professors*, who frames the issue as a particular mode of resistance. The educational and intellectual tasks that define the humanities cannot be effectively

⁸⁰ Anthony Aveni, *Class Not Dismissed*, (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2014), 130.

⁸¹ Andrew Delbanco, “Discussion” in William Bowen, *Higher Education in the Digital Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 141.

⁸² Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

“granularized,” making them a “poor candidate for IT-enhanced online delivery.”⁸³ This metaphor, and the argument underlying it, arbitrarily limits the humanities educator on two fronts. First, it suggests that the disciplines constituting the humanities are unilateral and rigidly defined, a position their own institutional history does not support. Second, Donoghue’s claim that the humanities resists “granularization” perpetuates a limiting view of what “IT-enhanced” education has been and can be in the future. Donoghue reveals a lack of interest in parsing the nuances of the historical trajectory of educational technology and the dramatic shifts of participatory culture. More, he presumes that the presence of technology nullifies the presence of both teacher and student, rendering both entirely subject to the machine, a position Caxton’s knowledge-making strategies in *The Mirrour of the World* resist. Michelle Miller, in *Minds Online*, challenges this in more contemporary terms: “what technology allows us to do is amplify and expand the repertoire of techniques that effective teachers use to elicit the attention, effort, and engagement that are the basis of learning.”⁸⁴ Miller’s sense of amplification is crucial – emerging educational technologies are tools to be wielded, and their effects are not predetermined. Rather than a limiting factor based on the sophistication of the granularization, “the tools we use can and do change us. But when we use these tools mindfully, we can remain

⁸³ Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 101. Donoghue’s “granular” metaphor is part of a broader rhetorical strategy whereby proponents of online education tout its customizability from the perspective of students. For instance, Sarah Porter in *To MOOC or Not to MOOC*: “MOOCs are turning the traditional higher education proposition on its head, as they are allowing students to choose to learn from a huge range of different small, granular course offerings, rather than committing to a single institution and being limited to their courses.” Sarah Porter, *To MOOC or Not to MOOC: How Can Online Learning Help to Build the Future of Higher Education?* (Waltham: Chandos Publishing, 2015), 113.

⁸⁴ Michelle Miller, *Minds Online* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), xii.

in control of those changes, shaping them to benefit our students.”⁸⁵ Focusing only on the platform grants technology too much sentience, treating tool as if it were wielder.

To premise the creation of a complex institution of learning on an idealized form of physical encounter that describes the experience of a minority of students is dangerous. Narratives of nostalgia too easily posit a rift between the historical mission of the university grounded in physical presence of educator and student and the layers of technological mediation that challenge conventional framings of that bond in the present. As Heather Kanuka and Charmaine Brooks put it, “the very idea of seeking to restore the interpersonal relationships between professors and students from the time of Socrates has been perceived by many as the spirit and essence of a university education.”⁸⁶ The search for personal connection recalls Newman’s ideal university, a mind forging forth into the flow of information and conceptual play. But in practice, this is harder to achieve. The sense is that, as John M. McCardell argues, “human interaction, for one thing; mentorship, for another; as well as conversation, discussion, and debate; lifelong friendships, structure, community” is the work of the college experience, the fundamental reason for its existence, and for these experiences to be “actual, real – perhaps even transforming” they *must not* be “virtual, contrived, or simulated.”⁸⁷ Educational technologies, especially those that facilitate the creation of digitized environments of learning, generate worry because they are built from, and help to cultivate, different kinds of reflection and engagement than institutions of higher learning have historically accommodated. Emerging educational

⁸⁵ Miller, *Minds Online*, 63.

⁸⁶ Heather Kanuka and Charmaine Brooks, “Distance Education in a Post-Fordist Time,” in *An Introduction to Distance Education: Understanding Teaching and Learning in a New Era*, ed. M.F. Cleveland-Innes and D.R. Garrison (New York: Routledge, 2010), 69-70.

⁸⁷ John M. McCardell Jr, ““Glowing against the Gray, Sober against the Fire’: Residential Academic Communities in the Twenty-first Century” in *Remaking College*, ed. Rebecca Chopp, Susan Frost, Daniel H. Weiss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 169.

technologies are one more step in the path that saw the lecture replaced by the seminar and the seminar replaced by the flipped classroom. The burden for cultivation falls to the educator, not to the tools she uses for the job.⁸⁸

Narratives of nostalgia ground their claims to the past in their privileging of a particular mode of physical presence and the meaningful knowledge that it produces. The pressing question facing institutions of higher learning today is, as Jon McGee phrases it, “if higher learning is best practiced as a closely held, personal, and even intimate experience, how much value does the experience add and how much is it worth paying for?”⁸⁹ Because of their ubiquity, the physical classroom and the encounters between teachers and students it facilitates have remained largely unexamined, and the technological objects that mediate those encounters, like books, pens, and paper are uncritically accepted. Narratives of progress rely on this, exposing the unspoken deficiencies of physical higher education (restricted access, distraction from educational goals and outcomes, etc.) as inhibitors of the work of teaching and learning. As the futurist Bryan Alexander writes, “visions of higher education drawn from popular culture, adults’ memories, nostalgia, or pundits are increasingly likely to be out of date, politically biased, culturally partial, simply not very useful any longer, or a combination of these.”⁹⁰ The model of higher education

⁸⁸ In their sense of lament, narratives of nostalgia participate in larger cultural concerns over increased digital interconnectedness and its potential erosion of personal intimacy and productive citizenship. Mark Bauerlein’s book *The Dumbest Generation* is a striking example of this. Bauerlein explores the “intellectual condition of young Americans” and finds something “insidious happening inside their heads”: “stories, pictures, tunes, and texts” instead of drinking at the “fonts of knowledge.” Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes our Future [Or, Don’t Trust Anyone Under 30]* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2008), 7, 10. Bauerlein’s argument remains unrecognizable in the context of the engaged digital citizenship that produced movements like Occupy, Black Lives Matter, and the Arab Spring.

⁸⁹ McGee, *Breakpoint*, 80.

⁹⁰ Bryan Alexander, *Gearing Up for Learning Beyond K-12* (Bloomington: Solution Tree Press, 2016), 3.

where young people “went to campuses to discover themselves, to explore the meaning of life, to seek without economic constraints” works well in Hollywood, but “we now live in different times.”⁹¹ Narratives of progress reject the integrity of physical presence as a precondition for meaningful learning, privileging personal choice and customization over the “intentional communities” model of most campuses. In so doing, they align with the idea that the student is a consumer who therefore controls the terms and conditions of her own education.

Narratives of progress question the legitimacy of consolidating higher education in physical institutions. They often rely on the rhetoric of revolution and premise that revolution on the weakening control institutions wield over access to and production of knowledge. For emblematic examples, I turn to two recent monographs: Ryan Craig’s *College Disrupted* and Kevin Carey’s *The End of College*, both published in 2015, each relying heavily on metaphors of dispersal. The subtitle of Craig’s book, *The Great Unbundling of Higher Education*, reveals his thesis: “MOOCs,” especially in their hyper-visible incarnations around 2011 and 2012, “represented the moment when all of higher education – including our most prestigious institutions – not only began to take online learning seriously, but embraced it as central to the future.”⁹² Across the enterprise, MOOCs reminded educators and institutions that “The Great Unbundling of higher education is underway.”⁹³ MOOCs alone did not and will not cause the “Great Unbundling,” especially considering how many different instances and environments of distributed, distance, and online learning predate them, but Craig’s image is nevertheless instructive. Carey’s book takes the metaphor one step further, speculating that after the

⁹¹ Alexander, *Gearing Up*, 32.

⁹² Ryan Craig, *College Disrupted: The Great Unbundling of Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 75.

⁹³ Craig, *College Disrupted*, 210.

unbundling will come “the University of Everywhere.”⁹⁴ While “Harvard and MIT are helping to build” this “new and unprecedented institution,” Carey recognizes continuity with the enterprise of higher learning overall: “*All* education is distance education. An educational process or environment is something designed by people *other than you*, in a way that is meant to instigate learning that would not have happened had you been left to your own devices.”⁹⁵ Carey does not go so far as to recognize the depth of this continuity in objects and practices of technological mediation that have historically conditioned the pursuit of knowledge, like Caxton’s vernacular humanist books, but he steps toward it. In these narratives, technological mediation is the natural evolution of the enterprise of higher education. But when they lean too heavily on rupture and historical break, both fail to fully realize the much longer timeframe across which the evolution of mediation has taken place.

The speculative dispersal of teachers, students, and educational content proposed by Craig and Carey relies on the hortative language of revolution to claim purchase on the conditions for meaningful learning. This is a sentiment explicitly in play in Richard A. DeMillo’s *Revolution in Higher Education*, published in 2015. DeMillo’s “small band” refers to the Silicon Valley and Stanford University-oriented MOOC producers Coursera and Udacity, and their counterpart in the east, the Harvard and MIT-founded edX. In DeMillo’s narrative, if this very small group has “their way, everything about higher education will be changed forever. What is happening to the world’s colleges and universities is in every sense a revolution.”⁹⁶ According to the narrative of progress, this revolution is altering the organizational logic of the university and how it negotiates encounters between teachers, students, and educational content, a shift DeMillo

⁹⁴ Carey, *The End of College*, 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 97.

⁹⁶ Richard A. DeMillo, *Revolution in Higher Education: How a Small Band of Innovators Will Make College Accessible and Affordable* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 2.

registers cartographically: “a world map had been redrawn.”⁹⁷ DeMillo leverages MOOCs as a crystallizing example of a larger shift, envisioning revolution not as “a single movement or single technology” but instead as “a set of aspirations about what the world’s colleges and universities could become.”⁹⁸ Despite the drama of his rhetoric, DeMillo’s claims are frequently housed as conditionals: “if” the innovators have their way, what higher education “could become” changes. Like Craig’s “Great Unbundling,” DeMillo’s revolution is only partly here, the dispersal of institutions into Carey’s “University of Everywhere” only partially realized.

Conditional if/then logics reveal a problem with narratives of progress that rely on the rhetoric of revolution: without acknowledging the mediating effects of time, these are stories attempting to establish momentary constellations of platforms and technologies as solid foundations from which to depart. The relationship between emergent platforms and nascent educational technologies is often branded positively as one of “disruption.”⁹⁹ Like all technological objects, though, MOOCs and other innovations operate by degrees of augmentation rather than complete paradigm shifts. MOOCs themselves are not uniform, and their influence on higher education is diverse.¹⁰⁰ While much of the controversy surrounding this platform focuses on its threats to the socio-economic structures of American higher education, one of its immediate successes is its capacity to motivate educators to rethink how they teach and empower students to reconsider the conditions for their learning. In this I follow Henry Jenkins, who recognizes in new media environments not the presumption that “new platforms liberate

⁹⁷ DeMillo, *Revolution in Higher Education*, 40.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

⁹⁹ Christensen and Eyring, *The Innovative University*, xxv and *passim*.

¹⁰⁰ Claire H. Major and Stephanie J. Blackmon write that “MOOCs are not a single monolithic entity. They have evolved, quickly to be sure, but their various origins point to important philosophical differences among them, some subtle and some quite the opposite.” Claire H. Major and Stephanie J. Blackmon, “Massive Open Online Courses: Variations on a New Instructional Form,” *New Directions in Institutional Research*, no. 167 (2016): 12.

people from old constraints” but rather “that the affordances of digital media provide a catalyst for reconceptualizing other aspects of culture” – namely, the transactions of knowledge at the heart of higher education.¹⁰¹ The MOOC controversy exposes the continued effacement of technological mediation from the history of knowledge production and higher learning, a point highlighted by the narratives of nostalgia and progress their dramatic presence, in part, inspires.

In this chapter, I have explored the effacement of technological mediation from the history of knowledge production in higher education, especially as that history shapes established and emergent practices of teaching and learning. This erasure fuels the rhetoric of crisis. Nostalgia and progress denote positions in the flow of time. But our encounters with time are always contained within frames of reference grounded in the present and mediated by technology. The philosopher José Ortega y Gasset captures this tension nicely in *Man in Crisis*, his exploration of modernity and moments of transition:

So for the very reason that to live is to feel oneself propelled toward the future, we recoil from it as from a greased slide and fall back into the past, where we dig in our heels so as to take a fresh start toward the future, our future which we must bring into being. The past is the only arsenal where we can find the means of making our future real.¹⁰²

Ortega y Gasset’s prose recalls the struggle to reconcile continuity with tradition and the departure from the past. We must “bring into being” our own relationship to time, but we find ourselves digging in our heels. For Ortega y Gasset, time is negotiated mechanically. “Propelled toward to the future, we recoil” as if on a “greased slide.” Even as evangelists of higher learning

¹⁰¹ Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁰² José Ortega y Gasset, *Man and Crisis*, trans. by Mildred Adams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1958), 120.

like John Henry Newman abstract the process of “making our future real” as a transcendent relationship between mind and idea, Ortega y Gasset reminds us that knowledge is always more material than that: our minds encounter time through layers of technological mediation no less than our bodies. The legacy of the classical liberal arts may have become tacitly transcendent in its adoption as a vanguard against pragmatic utility, but that need not draw the humanities away from their material and technological embeddedness. Vernacular humanist books, like William Caxton’s *The Mirrour of the World* or *The Order of Chyualry*, contain both convergences in time and contests of value: the lineage of knowledge production in the liberal arts, extending back to the classical philosophers, encounters emergent mass-production and wide cultural dissemination. Narratively and materially, the technological mediations of print keep humanism and the humanities rooted in the *humus* and *humanus*, the ground of knowledge in the world. The future of higher education depends upon our capacity to find the means of making in the arsenal of the past, a process requiring us to embrace, rather than efface, our debts to technology.

CHAPTER 2

HUMANISM IN THE FLOW OF VERNACULAR TIME

The contraction of time intervals, the sense of closeness to the bookshops of ancient Rome, the celebration of the return of the muses and of the reappearance of a golden age lasted through the first century of print and beyond. During the first century of printing, the spirit which had animated the Italian revival was quickened, even as the texture of book culture was enriched and the skills of artists and craftsmen were perfected.

-- Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*¹

Spirit and texture. Elizabeth L. Eisenstein uses these two registers to define humanism in the first century of the print era, suspended between the spirit of the “Italian revival” and its reach for the classical past and the cutting-edge technological innovations that constitute the “texture of book culture.” As both lineage and immanence, humanism – like the liberal arts before it and the humanities after – is an expression of time. For Eisenstein, humanistic time is both abstract and material, a tension captured between the covers of the printed book. In the digital age, spirit and texture find expression in two distinct paths taken by the institutional extension of humanism, the humanities: intellectual nostalgia and technological progress. These paths are defined by where and how they locate value, either in the transcendent continuity of literary history or in material networks of readers and texts. N. Katherine Hayles identifies the tension between these when she writes that “technical objects are always on the move toward new configurations,” and that “temporality is something that not only happens within them but also is carried by them.”² Books are technical objects, produced by and making meaning through

¹ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and cultural transformations in early-modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1: 191.

² N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 89.

layers of mediation. Their manipulations of time distort the relationships of value we build and communicate through them. Advocates for the humanities working in an era of crisis and disruption too easily efface the materiality of the technical ensembles they study in favor of invoking the pedagogical transcendence of the “good.”³ Humanism, and the practices of teaching and learning it informs, has taken the book as its chosen interface, an object strategically designed to mediate memory of the past and action for the future. My argument in this chapter follows Eisenstein back to the first centuries of print, exploring the collusion of spirit and texture and its effects on how we make and interpret value through the technology of the book.

The nature of the book conditions our experience of time as readers: transcendence and materiality converge.⁴ Early modern printed books substantiate a lineage extending back in time through their stories, tropes, and genres. But they also shape their material future through the strategies of technological mediation that define them in cultural space. Beyond its manipulations of time, the printed book becomes a site of contest between the authority of literary history and the new forms of mediation that condition the relationship between author, printer, and reader. In this chapter, then, the book stands as an instance of the encounter between past and future as well as of the dynamics of cultural value both high (traditional literary authority) and low (emergent modes of production and dissemination) as each are mediated by

³ In *The Value of the Humanities*, Helen Small identifies this as one of the core modes of justification for the contemporary humanities: “the value of the objects and cultural practices the humanities study and the kinds of scholarship they cultivate have value ‘for their own sake’—that they are good in themselves.” Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 175.

⁴ In *The Coming of the Book*, Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin acknowledge that the book is “a triumph of technical ingenuity” but also “one of the most potent agents at the disposal of western civilisation in bringing together the scattered ideas of representative thinkers.” Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450-1800*, trans. David Gerard, ed. by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and David Wootton (London: NLB, 1976), 10.

technology. I label this simultaneous experience of transcendent continuity and material networks of mediation *vernacular time*, and claim that its alternating currents of literary compression and technological expansion define humanism in the era of print and, by extension, the humanities in the digital age.⁵ Approaching humanism's relationship to time and value through the logic of the book, this chapter extends the claim that knowledge in the liberal arts, and especially in the humanities that grew from them, relies on technological mediation.

Humanism's malleability is both its greatest historical asset and its biggest critical liability.⁶ In this chapter, I elaborate humanism in three modes: ideological, material, and narrative. In the first part, I explore the tension between transcendent continuity and material networks in the voices of two literary critics, Harold Bloom and John Guillory. I sharpen their approaches by applying them, reading Dante Alighieri's early fourteenth-century Italian poem the

⁵ The concept of *vernacular time* is indebted to the exploration of vernacularity in scholarship on medieval and early modern literature. This tradition formed in the last decades of the 20th century in response to the exegetical criticism of D.W. Robertson. In D.W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), medieval literature consisted mainly of signs and symbols pointing back (if read properly) to the Augustinian idea of loving God and neighbor: *caritas*. This mode of reading positions texts as conduits for ideas that transcend time. Across the 1980s and 1990s, scholars responded to "Robertsonianism" by building on bibliographic scholarship and uncovering the local and material histories of medieval textual production, grounded in books and readers rather than ideas. Key to this work was Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), and David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). Each relied on developing a contrast between the vernacular culture of everyday folks and the scholastic culture of the academic and ecclesiastic institutions. "Vernacularity," as Alastair Minnis puts it in *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature*, encompasses a broad range of "acts of cultural transmission and negotiation" through which authority was "translated, appropriated, dispersed, exploited," acts not limited to translation from Latin to English or other vernaculars. Alastair Minnis, *Translations of Authority in Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

⁶ For a substantive exploration of the linguistic, historical, philosophical, and institutional dynamics of humanism and its cognates, see Vito Guistiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism'," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46 no. 2 (1985): 167-195.

Commedia as a dramatization of vernacular time that unfolds in the suspension of nostalgia and progress as coterminous goals of the historical project of humanism. In the second part, I turn to the printed book as the medium of contact between literary continuity and vernacular network. Medieval and early modern humanists sought continuity in literary history that transcended time. But their books, and the print shops that made them, contained that continuity in material networks. I locate this tension of spirit and texture in William Caxton's 1485 *Le Morte d'Arthur* and Wynkyn de Worde's subsequent editions of *Le Morte* in 1498 and 1529, specifically the paratextual elements that constitute what William Kuskin has called the "programming language" of the book, shaping the readerly experience of time.⁷ The relationship between genre and structure embroils *Le Morte d'Arthur* in tension between literary authority and the changing conditions of vernacular reading in the print era. In the third part of this chapter, I turn to the narrative convergence of transcendence and materiality, looking at practices of reproduction that mark the English print history of Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra's *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605 and 1615) and its continuation Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda's *Segundo Tomo del Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1614). As much as Cervantes' and Avellaneda's stories require readers to suspend their disbelief when it comes to memory and the effects of reading, so the printed editions they inspire manipulate access to author and tradition. Each of these books interfaces the spirit and texture of its moment, leveraging linguistic and technological mediation to draw readers into the flow of vernacular time.

At the center of this chapter is the conviction that humanism is about time, expressed as a relationship between transcendent literary continuity, the mechanical technologies that reproduce it, and the material networks through which it spreads. Rendering humanism a mode of

⁷ William Kuskin, *Recursive Origins: Writing at the Transition to Modernity* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 173.

encounter between time and value in the form of the book highlights its status as historical phenomenon *and* institutional practice. At the end of *Recursive Origins*, Kuskin proposes the capacity of the book to negotiate cultural capital by deconstructing authority in the 1623 First Folio collection of the works of William Shakespeare. Kuskin contends that as modern readers, we have been conditioned to read “in the shadow of the First Folio,” meaning that when we constitute Shakespeare as a timeless and transcendent author, we read in a way that “isolates the text from history and, ultimately, from technology” – we maintain the illusion of authorial coherence at the expense of the material fragments that produce and sustain it.⁸ From the perspective of the individual reader, the monumental book effaces the messiness at the juncture of continuity in time and materiality in space. This transmutation distorts the historical conditioning of humanist inquiry. As Jonathan Sterne points out: “we depend on elaborate technical accomplishments to do our work,” but we turn around and “talk about the work as if it’s just a set of ideas, separate from the material forms in which those ideas circulate.”⁹ Humanists in the digital age must remember that, in the words of Bonnie Mak, the page is “an expressive space for text, space, and image; it is a cultural artifact; it is a technological device. But it is also all of these at once,” no matter how mediated – it is an interface, “the material manifestation of an ongoing conversation.”¹⁰ This is a conversation between author and reader, indeed, but no less one between teachers, learners, and the institutions that join them. When, collectively, humanities educators break the spell of reading in the shadow of the First Folio, we will recognize the work of print-era humanists in our own, recasting its relationship to cultural

⁸ Kuskin, *Recursive Origins*, 206.

⁹ Jonathan Sterne, “The Example: Some Historical Considerations,” in *Between Humanities and the Digital*, ed. Patrik Svensson and David Theo Goldberg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 17.

¹⁰ Bonnie Mak, *How the Page Matters* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 18, 21.

and institutional change in the digital age. Humanism is an expression of tension between transcendent continuity and material network. Books contain this tension, reproducing it in encounters with readers and inscribing it through time. The vernacular book teaches humanists their task: to leverage technological mediation as an historical mode of knowledge production as much as a present opportunity to extend the work of higher learning in the twenty-first century.

Cultural Capital, Dante, and the *Mamma* of all Humanisms

The two axes in the history of humanism I have outlined, intellectual nostalgia and technological progress, can be understood through the lens of the individual reading subject and his or her relationship to memory in time and value in objects. But the two also exert pressure on institutions. Humanism has had difficulty in balancing its identity within the academy. On the one hand, it is an historical phenomenon transitioning between pre-modern and modern. On the other hand, it is a mode of textual, conceptual, and historical inquiry employed by many disciplines, literary studies in particular. In both cases, processes of canon formation mark humanism's lineage. This section parses questions of value and time in two phases. First, I unpack the relationship between literary history and cultural capital in books by two influential critics: *Cultural Capital* by John Guillory (1993), and *The Western Canon* by Harold Bloom (1994), both written in the aftermath of the culture wars that reshaped higher education (and the humanities in particular) in the 1980s. Both Guillory and Bloom respond to strains of spirit and texture in the way literary studies engages the legacy of humanism, and their books provide a useful framework for approaching the negotiations of authority and readerly experience through literary and print history. In the second phase I explore cultural capital and vernacular time as a

synthesis of transcendent continuity and material innovation in Dante Alighieri's fourteenth-century poem the *Commedia*. My thesis in this section is that recognizing material instantiations of canon –the syllabus *and* the book – challenges the transcendence of influence by grounding texts and readers, teachers and students, in material networks of literary production. Dante's *Commedia*, a work emblematic of both modern canon-building and medieval vernacular innovation, demonstrates the tension of literary history at the intersection of classical authority.

In *Cultural Capital*, John Guillory advances the thesis that the value of literary works must be seen as “the vector of ideological notions which do not inhere in the works themselves but in the context of their institutional presentation, or more simply, in the way in which they are taught.”¹¹ For Guillory, “canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission, its relation to other works in a collocation of works – the syllabus in its institutional locus, the school.”¹² Guillory's thesis is rooted in a sociology of art: the great books are not great because of an internally generated genius that extends forward and ripples backward through time but rather because decision makers consciously created them as touchstones through a centuries-long process of allusion, condensation, and curation. For Guillory, those stakeholders are the same ones who design curricula and write syllabi. The canon has no “concrete location as a list” – but the syllabus does.¹³ Guillory finds in the syllabus a self-sustaining myth: those books which educators choose to teach are the books they are *supposed* to choose because they are the *best books to choose*. Guillory's syllabus exposes the material and transactional undercurrents of canon-building practices that shape humanist inquiry in the academy.

¹¹ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), ix.

¹² Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 55.

¹³ *Ibid*, 30.

Guillory builds his approach to cultural capital out of the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. For Bourdieu, capital is a way of articulating how objects move through different domains of production: economic, social, and cultural.¹⁴ Bourdieu's exploration of how cultural goods are appropriated both materially and symbolically is of greatest interest to Guillory because it grants access to the forces that shape the production and reception of literary objects in the academy. For Bourdieu, the struggle in the world of literature is "the monopoly of the power to say with authority who is authorized to call himself a writer; or, to put it another way, it is the monopoly of the power to consecrate producers or products."¹⁵ This struggle can take place in a field of restricted production (art for art's sake, academic writing, etc.) or in a field of large-scale cultural production (popular art and literature).¹⁶ The former relies on "an educational system which legitimizes it"; the latter is dependent on the market.¹⁷ For Bourdieu, institutions of higher education participate in a process of consecration, and as artistic products move across this field they accrue cultural capital.¹⁸ Symbolic goods are two-faced: they are both "a commodity and a symbolic object."¹⁹ As commodities, art objects exist in social and material networks dependent on time. As symbols, they transcend time in pathways of continuity. In this

¹⁴ Cultural capital is of most interest here, because in its "objectified state" cultural capital influences the production and reception of cultural goods, including art, literature, and machinery. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," trans. Richard Nice, in *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 242, 243.

¹⁵ Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed," *Poetics* 12 (1983): 323.

¹⁶ Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," *Poetics* 14 (1985): 17.

¹⁷ Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," 32.

¹⁸ In fact, within such institutions it is difficult to break "the circle in which cultural capital is added to cultural capital." As the academy turns "social hierarchies into academic hierarchies," it participates in this process. Pierre Bourdieu, "Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction," in *Knowledge, Education, and Cultural Change*, ed. Richard Norman (London: Tavistock, 1973), 79, 60.

¹⁹ Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," 16.

tension, humanism expresses itself as a phenomenon reliant on both spirit and texture. Guillory's reading of Bourdieu opens literary studies to this generative paradox.

Guillory's reading of literary history as a function of cultural capital proposes that negotiations of canon are always actually revisions of a particular syllabus.²⁰ This challenges a long held conviction in the humanities that the Western canon is a lineage connected through transcendent aesthetic coherence, an approach emblemized by Harold Bloom's magisterial *The Western Canon*. In arguing for the "perpetual agon between past and present" engaged in by strong works, Bloom holds fast to the conviction that "the deepest truth about secular canon-formation is that it is performed by neither critics nor academics, let alone politicians. Writers, artists, composers themselves determine canons, by bridging between strong precursors and strong successors."²¹ In Bloom's formulation, canon is about ideas moving through time expressed in affinities of style, challenging and reifying strategies in ever changing textual manifestations. Bloom dismisses cultural capital, especially as it conditions literary value, as "either a metaphor or an uninteresting literalism."²² In either case, capital is a sociological distraction from the work of criticism proper, which should address the aesthetic effects of literature and the relationship strong works build with their readers. Bloom's recognition that literary influence is transacted through time is a useful one. But in remaining on the conceptual level, his sense of canonical continuity ignores the layers of technological mediation that produce relationships between readers and books in lived time. Stripping books of their materiality limits

²⁰ Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 30.

²¹ Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 520, 522.

²² Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 518. As literalism, cultural capital merely refers to the commonplace propaganda of "publishers, agents, and book clubs." As metaphor, cultural capital is even worse: "as a figure of speech, it remains a cry partly of pain, partly of the guilt of belonging to the intellectuals spawned by the French upper middle class" (a thinly-veiled jab at the influence of Bourdieu). Bloom, *The Western Canon*, 518.

their capacity to teach readers about the dynamics of time and value that shape humanist inquiry and the institutions that foster it. From the perspective of readers, Bloom's canon remains an abstract salon of artists and writers influencing each other across the centuries, distinct from art objects produced and transacted in the marketplace. All spirit, no texture.

The historical project of humanism has often been framed by this vision of influence-as-midwifery, with consecrated creators nurturing and ushering those influenced by them through time. But formulations of humanism at this scale remain mythical. In scholarship on humanism in line with this tradition, the language of rebirth in the mode of classical antiquity is pervasive. Roberto Weiss, for instance, notes that humanism brings "back to life the classical spirit."²³ Likewise J.P. van Praag finds in humanism the animating energy of the Renaissance, a period in which "man discovered a new freedom. He had no fixed pattern of life but had to shape his life by means of decisions. This was accomplished by a particular responsibility, also with regard to society. The idea of human dignity appeared as an expression of the special possibilities of man."²⁴ Accounts like these, searching in the past for a root point of growth that leads to the ennobling elements of intellectual culture we value today, suggest a Renaissance that brushed off the shackles of medieval determinism and allowed human beings to find their inherent value in the world. In light of this nostalgic rhetoric, there are critics who write humanism off as a simple vehicle for lament of the modern and uncritical embrace of the past. Lionel Trilling claims that the humanist conception of the past is simplistic, that humanism places "a special value upon ranging backward in time to find in a past culture the paradigms by which our own moral lives are put to test" and that it remains "resolute in the belief that there is very little in this transaction

²³ Roberto Weiss, *The Dawn of Humanism in Italy* (London: H.K. Lewis & Co., 1947), 15.

²⁴ J.P. van Praag, *Foundations of Humanism*, trans. Judy Herget (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), 45.

that is problematic.”²⁵ Such perceived naïveté leads critics like Leon Wieseltier to claim, in a recent essay, that humanism is “the cheapest target of all,” easily characterized as “sentimental, flabby, bourgeois, hypocritical, complacent, middlebrow, liberal, sanctimonious, constricting and often an alibi for power.”²⁶ Much of the perception of humanism, especially in the academy, is bound up in myths that emphasize the kind of simple nostalgia Trilling rejects, the kind built up by romantic historiography and affirmed by humanities educators fearful about the future.

Cultural capital à la Guillory and Bourdieu remains a useful rubric for determining how humanism frames a relationship between literary authority, aesthetic value, and canonicity. The historical project of humanism is an exercise in exposing and suppressing this capital as it informs and infuses the commodities of the present and the symbolic objects of the past. To put these threads of humanism in context, I turn now to a very old book with a lot of accrued capital: Dante Alighieri’s *Commedia*. Dante (b.1265 – d.1321) wrote the *Commedia*, a Christian epic with classical overtones composed in his native Tuscan dialect of Italian, across the first and second decades of the fourteenth-century, completing it just before his death. In three parts, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, the poem presents Dante the pilgrim, a character who finds himself at a crossroads in life not unlike the poem’s exiled author. Dante meets Virgil, a version of the Augustan poet Publius Vergilius Maro (b.70 BCE – d.19 BCE) best known for the *Aeneid*, who guides him through hell, up through purgatory, and into paradise. There, Dante meets his beloved Beatrice and ultimately encounters the divine. The *Commedia* is the culmination of Dante’s work – a full expression of the poetic authority of the Italian vernacular and a provocative synthesis of classical and medieval tropes and genres. The *Commedia* is perhaps second only to Shakespeare

²⁵ Lionel Trilling, “Why We Read Jane Austen,” in *The Moral Obligation to be Intelligent*, ed. Leon Wieseltier (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giraud, 2001), Kindle edition, loc. 9468.

²⁶ Leon Wieseltier, “Among the Disrupted,” *The New York Times*, January 1st, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/18/books/review/among-the-disrupted.html>.

in discussions of influence in the Western canon, and thus stands a perfect example for exploring the tension of spirit and texture I have highlighted in the history of humanism. Dante's poem flows in vernacular time, bridging the lineage of literary authority privileged by Bloom and the familial immanence of its living breathing language in time, fitting within the material paradigm proposed by Guillory. The *Commedia* exemplifies the etymology of "vernacular," evoking the intimacy of the *verna* (the domestic nurse or female servant) in the ingenuity and flexibility of its language while, at the same time, speaking in the generic and tropic registers of literary authority. In the hybridity of its words and pages, the *Commedia* is the interface between spirit and texture.

Dante's *Commedia* strategically frames the relationship between its readers and literary authority in time. It is a poem of encounter between the classical past and the vernacular present. The poem represents, in the words of Teodolinda Barolini, a "contamination" of the classical and the medieval, establishing a strong link between its author and his classical antecedents.²⁷ Dante is heavily invested in the work of time, authority, and language, and the connection is tense. The feeling that language is searching for the means to action is everywhere apparent. In this shift we find Dante carefully implicating his readers, recognizing that effects on the level of narrative compound on the level of reading. The opening of the *Purgatorio* announces the drama of this encounter:

e canterò di quel secondo regno

dove l'umano spirito si purga

²⁷ Teodolinda Barolini, *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 105. As Jelena Todorovic notes in reference to Dante's early work, he "openly argues that his literary production should enjoy the same privileges enjoyed by the ancient masters." Jelena Todorovic, *Dante and the Dynamics of Textual Exchange: Authorship, Manuscript Culture, and the Making of the Vita Nova* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), 73.

e di salire al ciel diventa degno.

Ma qui la morta poesi resurga,

o sante Muse, poi che vostro sono

[now I shall sing the second kingdom,/ there where the soul of man is cleansed,/

made worthy to ascend to Heaven./ Here from the dead let poetry rise up, O

sacred Muses, since I am yours.] (*Purgatorio*, Canto 1, verses 4-8)²⁸

These lines suggest the parallel paths of Dante, his poetry, and its readers. Dante adapts one of his guide's own tropes to his advantage. While he claims to sing (*canterò*) of the new setting, the second kingdom, he combines the representational and experiential resonances of his language. He follows the poet Virgil, whose introduction to his great poetic hero Aeneas in the *Aeneid* transmutes orality to inscription (*arma virumque cano*, "of arms and the man I sing"). In porting narrative experience from hearing to reading, Dante merges the immanence of his vernacular poem with the inscribed authority of literary time. The book itself participates in the act its characters desire, being cleansed (*purga*) and prepared for ascent. We have followed our wanderer through the center of the world and out the other side in *Inferno*, now endeavoring to climb toward the ultimate goal, a process of reading-as-cleansing. Dante's project in the *Purgatorio* shifts from that of the *Inferno* – in the depths, his language is used to represent and describe (i.e. long passages of gruesome details). In *Purgatorio*, Dante wants to move, enact, impact. Poetry must *resurga*, must rise from inert death. This is both a literal reference to the movement up from hell and a figural proposition for the shifting use of vernacular language. It is no coincidence that the number of vernacular neologisms increases between *Inferno* and

²⁸ All quotations and translations of the *Commedia* are from Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2002) and Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. Jean Hollander and Robert Hollander (New York: Anchor Books, 2004).

Purgatorio – the poem is *doing* new things. It is not uncommon for Dante the wanderer to be associated with Dante the man, nor is it unusual for Dante the wanderer to stand in for all men and women seeking a clear path through this life and the next. But in the *Purgatorio*, Dante draws these lines particularly thinly, asking his words to blur the distinction between representing and doing, between evoking the past and enacting the present.

Dante's vernacular neologisms point to the capacity of language to represent and incite. In the case of an important coinage in *Purgatorio*, *dismala*, Dante drives his native tongue to articulate the conceptual legacy of the classical and Christian past in a modern mode. Readers encounter *dismala* early in Canto 13 as a means of describing the function of the mountain Dante and Virgil now climb:

Noi eravamo al sommo de la scala,

dove secondamente si risega

lo monte che salendo altrui dismala

[We were at the summit of the stair/ where the mountain that unsins us as we climb/ is for the second time cut back.] (*Purgatorio*, canto 13, verses 1-3)

To express the allegorical relationship of place to action, Dante relies on the compositional flexibility of his vernacular. In his translation notes, Robert Hollander argues “the verb *dismalare* is almost certainly a Dantean coinage” and his translation of *dismala* – unsins – tries to “reflect its unusual character.”²⁹ *Dismala* is what happens to Dante during his ascent. But it also expresses what happens to the reader in his or her process of reading. The word builds the legacy of doctrine into the structure vernacular reading. Like many of Dante's inventions, it describes an action, in the words of Joan Ferrante, “which cannot be adequately described with

²⁹ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 284.

the available vocabulary.”³⁰ Dante draws our attention to this confluence of form and function by pairing *scala* with *dismala* in end-line rhyme – the stair is the thing which, when engaged, facilitates the unsinching. Syntax reinforces this relationship. These verses countenance vernacular imagination and the lineages of the past, building time into the spaces between language, experience, and reader. Dante deploys his vernacular not passively but strategically, reinforcing the capacity for change as literary authority is transmitted across time. He is using something old to build something new.

The experience of the past is laden with authority in Dante, but it is also lightened by its relationship to the vernacular present. Dante locates this encounter in the relationship between the poet Statius and his guide Virgil. Publius Papinius Statius (b.45 CE – d.96 CE) is best known for his Latin epic the *Thebaid* (modeled on Virgil’s own *Aeneid*) and he represents one of the many classical authorities in the *Commedia*. In his encounter with Dante, Statius crystallizes the relationship between vernacular language and authority the author explores. As with *dismala*, the drama between past and present comes to a head in a single “low” word: *mamma*. Literally *mamma* means “mother” or, less formally, “mommy.” But Dante uses these familial references strategically. In *mamma*, Dante pulls the literary authority of the past toward an intimate present, a vernacular word directly evocative of the etymological roots of “vernacular” in the domestic sphere. In describing his own poetic authority, Statius relies on vernacular relationships:

de l'Eneïda dico, la qual mamma
fummi, e fummi nutrice, poetando:
sanz' essa non fermai peso di dramma.

³⁰ Joan Ferrante, “A poetics of chaos and harmony” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, 2nd ed., edited by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 189.

[I mean the *Aeneid*. When I wrote my poems/ it was my mamma and my nurse./
Without it, I would not have weighed a dram.] (*Purgatorio*, canto 21, verses 97-99)

Statius locates the *Aeneid*, “the word that may have represented for Dante the height of classical eloquence” as Hollander puts it, in the position of nursemaid, the giver of nourishment, that which allowed his own poetry to grow and become substantial.³¹ The low vernacular word *mamma* thus facilitates the generation of the highest literary ambitions of the West. *Mamma* is the agent through which the authority of the distant past converges on the generative space of Dante’s poetic present. Dante embeds an intimate and immanent familial connection within the lineage of literary time. In so doing, he bridges classicism with the synchronic energy of emergent vernacular literary histories.

But the weighted import *mamma* holds in the *Purgatorio* is ironic. In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante’s Latin treatise on vernacular style and poetics, *mamma* is explicitly proscribed by the author. Dante’s message to poets of the vernacular “tragic style” is this:

sola vocabula nobilissima in cribro tuo residere curabis. In quoroum numero
neque puerilia propter sui simplicitatem, ut *mamma* et *babbo*, *mate* et *pate*...
[you will take care that only the noblest words remain in your sieve. You can by
no means number among those either the childish, like *mamma* and *babbo*, *mate*
and *pate*, because of their simplicity...] ³²

³¹ Dante, *Purgatorio*, 479-80.

³² Latin text of *De vulgari eloquentia* is from Dante Aligheri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, with commentary by Aristide Marigo, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Firenze: Felice le Monnier, 1957), 228. The English translation is from Dante Aligheri, *De vulgari eloquentia* in *Literary Criticism of Dante Aligheri*, ed. and trans. Robert S. Haller (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 46.

Vernacular poets should strive for nobility, and through that striving validate themselves in the flow of literary history. They should avoid simplicity, and any trappings of the rustic. And yet, *mamma* is there in the *Commedia*, always nursing, always growing in the context of expressing the links between classical authors of what Bloom would call “strong works.” In *Purgatorio*, *mamma* produces doubly, becoming the conduit for productive encounter between Statius and Virgil *and* between Dante, the modern vernacular poet, and classical literary authority. In this way, the vernacular literary project eclipses the authority it evokes by positioning itself as a precondition for literary production in time. Dante’s poem showcases the activity of his native tongue, growing, building, finding its ground and exploring its foundations. *Mamma* suggests both a comfort nestled in the past and a call to present action.

For Statius, Virgil was the motherly nurse, the *verna*, of poetry. For Dante, Virgil is the surety amidst the storm, the orienting pole in Dante’s new conception of the world. Like for Statius, Virgil takes on the functions of nurture and care, but the mode of contact is different. The relationship between Statius and Virgil is influence drawn through time; for Dante and Virgil, it is intimacy embedded in material space. At the close of *Purgatorio*, this desired proximity becomes clear. When Dante first encounters Beatrice, his mind reels:

volsimi a la sinistra col respitto
col quale il fantolin corre a la mamma
quando ha paura o quando elli è afflitto,
per dicere a Virgilio...

[I turned to my left with the confidence/ a child has running to his *mamma*/ when
he is afraid or in distress/ to say to Virgil...] (*Purgatorio*, canto 30, verses 43-6)

Unable to reconcile the majesty of Beatrice, her heavenly beauty overwhelming his capacity to understand, Dante looks to Virgil as a child to his *mamma*, an immanent source of safety and stability. Of course, at this point Virgil has gone. The poem has left classical precedent and thus Dante must navigate the future in his own emergent voice. That he returns again to the vernacular form *mamma* in this moment of crisis solidifies its function as a point of encounter between the literary authority of the past and as a point of departure toward an uncertain future. For Statius, Virgil's motherhood is an example in time from which to learn, a standard against which to be measured. But for Dante, in a state of childlike emergence, Virgil is a location in space, desired for comfort and guidance.

Dante's encounter with Beatrice and his turn toward Virgil allegorize the *Commedia's* operation in vernacular time. Just as the poem belabors these moments of cultural and linguistic exchange, it carefully crafts its reader's encounters with the past and with literary authority. The poem stands between: between classical antiquity and medieval present, between the transcendent continuity of literary history and the material networks of vernacular books. One striking example of this between-ness is the *Codex Altonensis* (Hamburg, Historische Bibliothek des Christianeums Hamburg, Ms. R 2), a manuscript of the *Commedia* produced between the middle decades of the fourteenth century and the first decade of the fifteenth.³³ The early folios of *Codex Altonensis* adopt the stylistic templates of medieval sacred illumination, a mode of appropriation, as Jeffrey Hamburger notes, allowing vernacular books to make claims to literary authority.³⁴ The latter, unfinished portions of the book evoke the emergence of print in the spectral juxtaposition of rubricated text and line sketches. *Codex Altonensis* exposes a tension

³³ All images and quoted material from the *Codex Altonensis* are from the facsimile edition: Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, ed. Hans Haupt, Hans Ludwig Scheel, and Bernhard Degenhart (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1965).

³⁴ Jeffrey Hamburger, *Script as Image* (Paris: Peeters, 2014), 54.

between vernacular authorship and authority. More than this, the features that link it to the medieval past are the very same that confront readers with its innovation. The logic of the *Codex Altonensis* frames Dante and his poem in vernacular time.

A compelling example of this effect is folio 5^v, a title page of sorts, richly illuminated and associating Dante with sacred authority both textually and by proximity to allegorized figures of holiness and secular learning. (Fig. 2.1) The page consists of two parts: a frame containing emblematic figures, alternating with grotesques, and a central panel that names the book and its author. The frame features ten figures. At the top center is Ecclesia, representative of Holy Church. Flanking her are Imperium (the State) on the left and Philosophia (learning) on the right. Supporting these three from beneath are representations of the seven liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). The illumination narrows slightly as the eye moves up the page. The wider base contracts as it moves toward the celestial figure at the top of the page. This narrowing follows the sight lines of the figures: each look toward the top central position, toward Ecclesia. The church, the state, and the mind are held up by the work of learning, and the recording of that learning in the disciplines of the seven liberal arts. As we saw in the previous chapter, William Caxton's *The Mirrour of the World* reinforces the sense that the liberal arts and the forms of inscription their learning invites in the vernacular book buttress the world by making meaning within it. The structure of the page frame sets the stage for literary authority by positioning the liberal arts and the conditions of learning they represent as the building blocks toward, first, the state and philosophy, and ultimately Holy Church itself. Folio 5^v strikes a relationship between knowledge and transcendence, and inscribes that relationship materially on the page.

The central panel of f.5^v augments the conceptual strategies revealed in the frame by injecting a new category of authority: the vernacular author. It marks itself apart from the frame by its rich blue background and gold lettering with floral insets. The text reads “LALTA COMEDYA DEL SOMMO POETA DANTE” (“the high comedy of the highest poet Dante”). The language is hortatory, establishing Dante’s authority with positional superlatives (*lalta* and *sommo*). But the central panel participates in the page’s meaning making in more sophisticated ways than mere description. While we might read the text starting from the top left corner and proceeding to the bottom right, the structural features of the frame push readers toward a different route. Like the frame, the panel starts wide at the bottom and narrows toward the top. We are confronted with two pathways – downward from transcendence (*lalta*) to materiality (*dante*) and upward from the poet through his pathway to canonization. Along this track, the author, Dante, forms the ground, upon which are built innovations in style (*poeta*) and genre (*comedy*). All three build upward toward the positional *lalta* and *sommo*. The vernacular author thus stands prepared to climb through art toward the highest levels of culture and the cosmos. Just as the verses of the *Purgatorio resurga*, so this title page draws Dante the author upward to the heights of church, state, and learning. The movement of the eye up through this page mirrors the ascent of Dante the wanderer during the course of the poem’s narrative. Thus, we read this page in two temporal and spatial frames. The emanation of the world of art, craft, and learning from the central figure of Ecclesia, a downward and outward flow through the page, growing and spreading. But we also read upward, as the vernacular poet and the practices of learning and writing build a foundation upon which it is possible to reach Ecclesia. This is a focusing and narrowing flow, akin to the structure of Dante’s poem, moving from the broadly dispersed and variegated world toward the unified source of love and knowledge.

Folio 5^v narrates the tension of vernacular time. By drawing vernacular authorship into relation with the seven liberal arts, the page allegorizes Dante's strategic vernacularity. The title page does the work of the poem in miniature, relying on visual strategies to reinforce the announcement of its content and subject. And in hybridizing its textual and visual messages, f.5^v anticipates a vernacular medium much more recognizable to our own era: the comic book. Comic books tell stories visually and textually, representing time and its manipulations spatially on the page. Likewise, f.5^v performs its work simultaneously in textual and visual registers, and through grid-like structures in both marginal frame and central panel, relying upon the parallel modes of reading and knowing that Dante requires in the narrative of his poem. In its structural evocation of the comics page, f.5^v might also be read allegorically as an emblem of the friction of vernacular art, capital, and authority. This title page emblemizes the convergence of transcendent literary history with the material means through which texts are produced in time.

The conferring of capital to Dante, the vernacular author, is extended in time by the modern facsimile edition of *Codex Altonensis*. This is a lavish production, containing full color facsimile pages of the entire manuscript, editorial apparatus, commentary, and notes in two volumes. Impressed on the cover of the book's two volumes is f.5^v, but with an important revision. The impression cuts the page's frame, containing the representative figures of the liberal arts, Ecclesia, Imperium, and Philosophia, leaving only the central panel, which focuses strictly on the name of the author and the poem. While the medieval manuscript needed the frame to highlight the emergent growth of vernacular art in the literary marketplace, the modern critical edition needs only a name: *Dante*. The page and its legacy tells the story of literary authority negotiated as cultural capital. In *Codex Altonensis*, the reader's entrance to the *Commedia* is mediated by the experience of medieval illumination, an experience evocative of

the past both in its aesthetic appearance and in the allegorical figures the page depicts. But only partially. This lavish opening is not sustained throughout the book, and by the time Dante meets Beatrice in the narrative, the unfinished manuscript pages are merely blocked text with the occasional uncolored sketch.

Folio 92^v (Fig. 2.2) exemplifies the spectral *mise-en-page* of the latter portions of *Codex Altonensis*, allegorizing a shift from the sacred to the worldly. The top and bottom of the page are dominated by rough sketches depicting Dante and Beatrice. At the top of the page, Dante gazes in ecstasy at his beloved, hands clasped at his chest. Beatrice stands with an inviting gesture, backed by angels. On the bottom of the page, the artist has depicted Dante's turn toward Virgil, toward the *mamma* figure of his journey. His arms and hands pull back and to the left, reaching for the absent guide. But his eyes remain fixed on Beatrice's face. His facial expression changes very little from the first illustration to the second, only his hands have moved. His hands, the tools of his trade, look to their predecessor, Virgil, as if needing the comfort of familiar craft. But Dante's vision is focused on the future, on the sublimity of his goal rather than the comfort of his guide. In sharp contrast to the brilliance of the earlier portions of the MS, these pages feel abandoned, fuzzy, and in-process. Folio 92^v reinforces the temporal pull of the poem, reminding readers that they are present in a moment of change, when past and present encounter each other in building the future. *Codex Altonensis* begins with the rich adornments of the sacred book; by its end, it stands austere, anticipatory. The flourishes of illumination give way to spectral sketches and isolated blocks of text. We know, as Nick Havely writes, that Dante's "work and reputation are implicated" in "the circulation of and access of texts, fourteenth-century writers' negotiation of the 'new vernacular author'; and the relationship between Latinity

and vernacularity.”³⁵ *Codex Altonensis* narrates the tension, mediating material and conceptual legacies of the past and the new modes of reproducibility vernacular literary culture relies upon.

Like the *Codex Altonensis*, Dante himself remains in period-limbo. Roberto Weiss has claimed that “rather than heralding the Renaissance, Dante marks the end of the Middle Ages.”³⁶ This logic has been used in the service of claiming a departure from the medieval past to the humanist present. But Dante’s sense of time is more complex than that model allows. Dante anticipates a vernacular humanism that flows through time rather than being bounded by it. Writing on the fifteenth century, Kuskin argues that vernacular humanism expresses a “link between the classical past and the English present,” a link which is “paradoxical” in the sense that in printing vernacular English books, the fifteenth-century book trade locates “Virgil and Ovid in the context of the English poetry of Chaucer, Lydgate, and Skelton,” a proximity that transgresses the strictures of lineage privileged by the early Italian humanists.³⁷ If traditional humanism is archaeological and curatorial, vernacular humanism is renovative. The former establishes canonicity in time; the latter appropriates it in space. Vernacular humanism challenges the concept of historical break, so prevalent in institutional conceptions of literary history, as Kuskin identifies in *Recursive Origins*: “if we acknowledge that there are no absolute moments of origin, and that novelty ultimately finds its origins as a self-referential part of some

³⁵ Nick Havely, *Dante’s British Public: Readers and Texts, from the Fourteenth Century to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 9-10.

³⁶ Roberto Weiss, *The Spread of Italian Humanism* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1964), 19. Similarly, Paul Oskar Kristeller associates Dante, Petrarch, and Salutati with the “more mediaeval and less modern” fourteenth century. Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Philosophy and the Medieval Tradition*, Wimmer Lecture XV (Latrobe: The Archabbey Press, 1966), 5. Charles G. Nauert describes Dante as a “gifted” medieval thinker. Charles Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20.

³⁷ William Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton: Literary Culture and Print Capitalism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 236.

larger sequence, then literary modernity cannot be premised on a historical break so much as on local textual encounters in which the past is reasserted and remade in the present.”³⁸ Vernacular humanism, and its extension in vernacular time, reorients the way humanists look at their own history *while also* challenging the erasure of materiality and technology from literary history. Recalling Eisenstein’s spirit and texture, if humanism operates within the transcendent continuity of literary time, vernacular humanism responds by pulling readers down into the material networks that actually transact its continuity.

The Quest for Vernacular Time

Vernacular time generates its force between the covers of books. To the extent that it expresses a play with transcendental continuity and material network, vernacular time’s best incubator is the print shop. In the form of the book, early printers stabilized the divergent timeframes of literary history and local production. This is especially true in the paratext that shapes the encounter between the reader and the page, the frontispieces, prefaces and prologues, tables of contents, and dedications.³⁹ Printing intervened in the work of humanism in positive ways, solidifying methodology, offering new forms of financial and intellectual support, and augmenting public impact and reception. It seems clear that printing was, as Seth Lerer writes, “not simply a technology but a form of social behavior located in encounters with the published

³⁸ William Kuskin, *Recursive Origins*, 48.

³⁹ I use the term paratext following Gerard Genette. For Genette, the elements of the book peripheral to the main text constitute paratext: “and although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to make present, to ensure the text’s presence in the world.” Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

word that define both a public life and a private subjectivity.”⁴⁰ The printed book leverages humanistic continuity into dispersed material networks. In this section, I read this effect in three books: William Caxton’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485), and Wynkyn de Worde’s two editions of *Le Morte* from 1498 and 1529. After placing these books within a context of vernacular humanism in the first century of print, I explore how all three frame the encounter between reader and Sir Thomas Malory’s romance narrative in distinct ways through the mediations of their paratextual architecture. Caxton’s and de Worde’s *Le Morte d’Arthurs* demonstrate the engagement of vernacular humanism both in and through time, exposing the intersections of literary history’s transcendent continuity and the technological mediations that produce it in the form of book.

It is worth briefly returning to the synthesis of spirit and texture Elizabeth Eisenstein identifies in the convergence of humanism and print. If, as Eisenstein suggests, the “thoughts of readers are guided by the way the contents of books are arranged and presented” such that “basic changes in book format might well lead to changes in thought-patterns,” the printed vernacular book lends itself even more securely to the operation of vernacular time.⁴¹ As Adrian Johns points out, “any printed book is, as a matter of fact, both the product of one complex set of social and technological processes and also the starting point for another”; for each printed book to exist at all, “a large number of people, machines, and materials must converge and act together.”⁴² Johns’ key point is the collusion of social and technological processes: paired with the individual interface of reader and page posited by Eisenstein, the printed book emerges as the

⁴⁰ Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: the scholarly imagination, medieval to modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 16.

⁴¹ Eisenstein, *The Printing Press*, 88-9.

⁴² Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 3.

intersection of value, time, and cultural form.⁴³ Books are objects that, like the humanists who write and read them, balance the past and the present, expressing the conditions of encounter between reader and idea in time.

Humanism pursues its renovations in time through text. As Martin Davies puts it, “there was no humanism without books. They were the prime material on which the movement was founded and the natural medium through which it was transmitted. All humanists were consumers, and usually also producers, of books.”⁴⁴ Books were a means by which humanists transposed the past onto the present. If humanists have historically invested in the need to excavate classical literary culture through texts, they have done so without being inimical to the innovative technologies through which that culture is disseminated. The advent of print was, as Jean-Claude Margolin notes, “a technical, mental, and social revolution with incalculable consequences.”⁴⁵ Print enhanced the core of the humanist project. Charles Nauert posits that “the advent of printing made textual improvements by humanist editors permanent and cumulative in a way impossible for manuscript books,” changing the nature of the humanist legacy: “the gains made by fifteenth-century textual scholars were firmly anchored and widely diffused in the text of thousands of printed books.”⁴⁶ These changes had an impact on the humanist’s audience, as well, according to Nauert: “the power of the printing press spread the desire as well as the ability

⁴³ The printed book is itself a hybrid form, and, as Julia Boffey reminds us: “any attempt to construct a uni-directional model of script to print is quickly complicated by evidence of the many different kinds of scribal activity” that inflect the production and consumption of books. Julia Boffey, *Manuscript and Print in London c. 1475-1530* (London: The British Library, 2012), 57.

⁴⁴ Martin Davies, “Humanism in script and print in the fifteenth century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 47.

⁴⁵ Jean-Claude Margolin, *Humanism in Europe at the Time of the Renaissance*, trans. John L. Farthing (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1989), 15.

⁴⁶ Nauert, *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe*, 61.

to read the classics far beyond the Latin-reading public.”⁴⁷ The relationship between humanism and print was a symbiotic one – humanists produced enough material to keep the presses running continuously, and the democratizing influence of the press extended the reach of their material. In the case of vernacular humanism, as Daniel Wakelin writes, “it is not that printing created a new conception of the widely disseminated text; rather, it is almost as if such a conception needed printing to reach its fullest potential.”⁴⁸

The link between the printed book and vernacular time is particularly acute in the aspects of the book that interface reader and story, paratexts like title pages, tables of contents, prologues, and epilogues. Roger Chartier, in *The Order of the Book*, writes “understanding the reasons and the effects of such physical devices (for the printed book) as format, page layout, the way in which the text is broken up, the conventions governing its typographical presentation, and so forth, necessarily refers back to the control that the authors but sometimes the publishers exercised over the forms charged with expressing intention, orienting reception, and constraining interpretation.”⁴⁹ While Chartier focuses primarily on supply-side constraint, the framing architecture of early printed books is also generative of readerly interpretation and meaning. Vernacular humanism relies on the architecture of paratext to mediate its encounters, as much as on the translation of story and reproduction of genre. If the main text of the narrative is where readers encounter the literary continuity of “strong works” in time, the paratext is where they encounter material networks in space. Prefatory material sells books, ushering readers into

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 198.

⁴⁸ Daniel Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature 1430-1530* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131.

⁴⁹ Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 28.

stories such that they feel compelled to buy.⁵⁰ And, as Peter Ramey argues, paratexts “serve as a meeting point of the old and the new,’ where early printers and publishers “articulate the meaning that printing technology has for the literary inheritance” reproduced with the technology of the press.⁵¹ Paratext, then, stands as an ideal site for investigating the dynamics of vernacular time, especially as it relates to the conscious and unconscious framing of cultural capital. The intersection of author, printer, publisher, and reader emerges as an acute instance of vernacular time, a “transactional” space, as Helen Smith and Louis Wilson might say.⁵²

William Caxton’s published output emblemizes the transactional role of paratext. Caxton was an English merchant, printer, and translator. He learned his craft in Bruges and Cologne, bringing it across the channel and solidifying the printing trade in England.⁵³ His printing endeavors expose the processes by which literary authority moves across time and disperses across space. Caxton worked with popular genres: romance, history, saints’ lives, etc. But in collecting these narratives, organizing them, and building editorial edifices announcing their utility when used properly, Caxton confers upon them the weight of literary authority. As Daniel Wakelin points out, “his prologues and epilogues imagine the possibilities of textual reproduction and dissemination which humanist pedagogy imagines; not in order to discipline or

⁵⁰ Michael Saenger notes how this function of books is often lost on modern scholars. Early modern readers were “consumers in a way we cannot be. We never look at an early modern book as an ordinary product we might buy for our daily reading; they did as a matter of course.” Michael Saenger, *The Commodification of Textual Engagements in the English Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 1.

⁵¹ Peter Ramey, “The Poetics of Caxton’s ‘Publique’: The Construction of Audience in the Prologues of William Caxton,” *English Studies* 96, no. 7 (2015): 734.

⁵² Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, “Introduction,” in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

⁵³ For more complete biographical accounts, see N.F. Blake, *Caxton: England’s First Publisher* (London: Osprey, 1976), Blake, *Caxton and His World* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969), and W.J.B. Crotch, *The Prologues and Epilogues of William Caxton* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).

limit his readers, but to ennoble them.”⁵⁴ In paratext, Caxton balances the ascent toward patron with the broad effects of engendering virtue downstream in his mass audiences. Caxton’s texts are objects of encounter between old and new, high and low, mediated by technology. Here especially, Caxton plays with what Kuskin identifies as the “two fundamental aspects of humanism – its scholarly claim to the past and its assertion of literary authority in the political present.”⁵⁵ Caxton’s paratextual apparatuses condense the elliptical play of past and present, drawing technology into continuity with the literary authority of the past.

Caxton’s romances, specifically, play with notions of past and present as a result of their genre, manipulating the interface of book and reader to create consistent and perpetual encounters with the transcendent continuity of literary history within the technological mediations of the book. Romance is a genre of contradiction, telling stories of nobility and the ethics of the upper class extending back through aristocratic lineage and yet remaining a popular genre, widely spread in manuscript and proliferated in print.⁵⁶ Romance roams freely across the field of cultural production. Caxton’s work in romance put innovative technological objects in tension with what Northrop Frye called the genre’s “persistent nostalgia.”⁵⁷ In Caxton, the energies that animate the humanist project and the genre conventions that mark romance confront one another. His investment in facilitating textual encounters between past and present,

⁵⁴ Wakelin, *Humanism, Reading, and English Literature*, 128. But also, as Tracy Adams reminds us, “Caxton never occults his involvement in commerce.” Tracy Adams, “‘Noble, wyse and grete lordse, gentilmen and marchauntes’: Caxton’s Prologues as Conduct Books for Merchants,” *Parergon* 22, no. 2 (2005): 66.

⁵⁵ Kuskin, *Symbolic Caxton*, 241.

⁵⁶ In some ways this paradox has led to marginalization. As Jordi Sanchez-Martí notes, stigmas of romance being a “literary subproduct deserving little attention” are historically pervasive. Jordi Sanchez-Martí “The Printed History of Middle English Verse Romances,” *Modern Philology* 107, no. 1 (2009): 4.

⁵⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 186.

which is a participation in the historical project of humanism, meets his predilection for hot sellers. Helen Cooper's assessment, that "humanism was a development added on to strong and deeply embedded native cultural and literary traditions," romance being "one of the most strongly rooted of all those traditions," finds Caxton applying the principles of humanist inquiry to the popular media of his day.⁵⁸

In his edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), the first English printing of Sir Thomas Malory's romance narratives, Caxton controls the readerly experience of time in three ways: a detailed prologue, an extended structural apparatus including book divisions and chapter headings, and a colophon implicating his work as printer with the work of authorship. The prologue demonstrates Caxton's dynamic synthesis of humanism and popular media. It facilitates encounters with the past as a means to enact change in the present instance of reading.⁵⁹ Caxton articulates the moral and ethical benefits of the book to all of its potential readers while retaining the deference to noble patrons that is a stock trope of his prose. The printer establishes his intention in producing the work and his audience: he has "sette it in enprynte / to the entente that noble men may see and lerne the noble actes of chyualrye / the Ientyll and vertuous dedes that somme knyghtes vused in tho dayes / by whyche they came to honour" (sig. iii^r).⁶⁰ He specifically associates his intent to print with both the observation by his audience and their education. The noble acts of chivalry, which were used "in tho dayes," can be reanimated in the present moment of reading. From Caxton's position as a publisher, he trusts that observation will lead directly to

⁵⁸ Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the death of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5-6.

⁵⁹ This showcases what S. Carole Weinberg calls the "transhistorical exemplarity" of the romance genre. S. Carole Weinberg, "Caxton, Anthony Woodville, and the Prologue to the *Morte Darthur*," *Studies in Philology* 102, no. 1 (2005): 65.

⁶⁰ Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Westminster, 1485. STC 801. John Rylands Library, Manchester. *EEBO*.

education. He has faith that acts of reading lead to acts of living. Caxton understands that the actions his text depicts happened in a hazy past, when such actions conferred honor on the men and women who performed them, but his text operates in a clearly defined present and through clearly defined networks of readers. As A.S.G. Edwards notes in “The Reception of Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*,” the printer’s “edition and its early reprints by de Worde were widely read,” inferred by the evidence that few copies of Caxton’s 1485 and de Worde’s 1498 and 1529 editions remain: these books were “literally read to destruction.”⁶¹ The text animates the past in the widespread moments of present reading.

In the prologue passage quoted above, Caxton restricts the push toward education to “noble men,” a limited audience considering the widespread popularity of romance. But shortly after, he substantially expands his reach: Caxton humbly beseeches “al noble lordes and ladyes wyth al other estates of what estate or degree they been of / that shal see and rede,” demurring to a much larger audience (sig. iii^r). All those who encounter it are urged to “take the good and honest actes in their remembraunce / and to folowe the same” (sig. iii^r).⁶² Anything anyone sees or reads in this book is an opportunity for remembrance and for learning by example. And “anything” here is broad. *Le Morte d’Arthur* contains “noble chyualrye / Curtosye / Humanyte frendlynnesse / hardynesse / loue / frendshyp / Cowardyse / Murdre / hate / vertue / and synne” (sig. iii^r). In Caxton’s conception, romance is instructive in civic life, but also personal, spiritual, and moral life. The readership is given a daunting task: to “doo after the good and leue the euyl” (sig. iii^r). The book becomes a mode instruction, an opportunity to “falle not to vyce no synne /

⁶¹ A.S.G. Edwards, “The Reception of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*,” in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards (Rochester: DS Brewer, 1996), 243.

⁶² Dorsey Armstrong has noted that Caxton is committed to unifying his readers “across class lines.” Dorsey Armstrong, “Gender and the Script/Print Continuum: Caxton’s *Morte Darthur*,” *Essays in Medieval Studies* 21 (2004): 135.

but textcersyse and folowe vertu” (sig. iii^r-iiii^v). Caxton’s prologue conceptually frames the text as a point of encounter between the examples of the past and the actions of the future.

Caxton’s paratext plays with expansion and contraction of readerly time in the material space of the book. Shortly after finishing the conceptual portion of the prologue, Caxton turns to the structuring interventions he makes on the story. Caxton informs his readers that “for to vnderstonde bryefly the contente of thys volume / I haue deuyded it in to xxj bookes / and euery book chapytred as here after shal by god|des grace folowe” (sig. iii^v). He describes each of the 21 books in the prologue itself, in order. Each book description introduces the main content and lists the number of chapters, for example: “the fyrst book shal treate how Vtherpendragon gate the noble conquerour kyng Arthur and conteyneth xxviiij chappytres” (sig. iii^v), and so on. The book descriptions are in-line with the rest of the prologue, and there is no separation between the commercial, conceptual, and structural aspects of this paratext. (Fig. 2.3) Caxton explains his architecture as a way to help readers “vnderstonde briefly” the book that they hold, which is large, episodic, narratively complex, and challenging to navigate.⁶³ By embedding the book

⁶³ Comparing Caxton’s edition to the Winchester manuscript of Malory’s book, which modern scholars only knew after its discovery in the 1930s, reveals the extent to which Caxton was committed to schematizing the book for his readers. James W. Spisak notes that the Winchester ms “is divided into ten parts, each marked by an ‘explicit,’ which form five larger units, corresponding to Caxton’s books I-IV, V-VII, VIII-XII, XIII-XVII, XVIII-XXI. Three of the major divisions are marked by a large decorated initial.” James W. Spisak, *Caxton’s Malory: A New Edition of Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur Based on the Pierpont Morgan Copy of William Caxton’s Edition of 1485* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 616. The relatively few divisions and relatively unmarked transitions make Winchester a substantially less navigable book – as Paul Needham writes in his facsimile edition of the Pierpont Morgan Library copy of Caxton’s 1485 edition, Caxton’s is “a more readable and hence more saleable text.” Paul Needham, *Le morte d’Arthur: Printed by William Caxton 1485*, Reproduced in facsimile from the copy in the Pierpont Morgan Library New York, ed. Paul Needham (London: Scholar Press, 1976). Winchester does add paratextual material in the form of red ink for proper names, brief marginal notes marking important events (like “A dreame of Arthyr” on f.17^r), and manicules (as on f.9^v and elsewhere), but the overall *mise-en-page* is driven toward unity of

descriptions in the main text of his prologue, maintaining *mise-en-page* between the prologue, the table, and the main text, Caxton claims for his structuring devices the authority to influence readerly experience of the narrative: architectural manipulation aids the book in producing the effect of “following virtue.” (Fig. 2.4)

But the book descriptions are only one layer of Caxton’s architecture. At the close of the prologue, as if recognizing the imposing scale of “xxj bookes whyche conteyne the somme of v hondred & vij chapytres” (sig. iii^r), Caxton provides a detailed “table or rubrysshe of the contente of chapytres” in each of his 21 books. For the next 29 pages, the reader understands “briefly” the full contents of Malory’s story, a schematic romance in miniature. Clustering the chapter headings at the front of the book, Caxton transfers the capacity to condition the readerly experience from the main text (Malory) to the form of the book itself. This structure empowers the reader to manipulate their experience with the book in ways that achieve the goals he outlines in his prologue. This temporal manipulation is sometimes subtle. For instance, of the close to 30 pages of the table, only pages 5-8 and 11 contain signatures on the recto pages, acting as a fragmented system of page numeration. Of course, there is no shortage of other numbers on these pages, as each individual chapter within each book is assigned a number. The effect is that the reader is overwhelmed with sequence, lost in interwoven timelines implicating both the narrative story of Malory’s romance and the paratext of Caxton’s book. When we finally come to the start of the main text, the page reminds us twice: at the top with the header “¶Capitulum primum” and at the foot of the page with its signature (sig. ai^r). Caxton’s table packages the temporal energy of the book for the reader, at once accelerating their movement through the story and holding them within paratextual pages in advance of actually reading the main text. Caxton populates the

present moment of reading with a compressed past, the whole book summarized, and the anticipation of an expanded and elaborated future.

But even after readers navigate that future in their acts of reading, they are not free of Caxton. He concludes his book by extending the value and authority of the author to his own enterprise as printer and publisher. In the first of the book's two colophons, Malory (the author) covers familiar ground, a humble request for readers to pray for him, "praye for me whyle I am on lyue" (sig. ee.vi^r). He ends the book figuratively, gesturing toward a natural extension between reading "from the begynnyng to the endyng" (sig. ee.vi^r) and the operation of prayer. Caxton the printer, however, remains insistently material. His secondary colophon acknowledges the value of Malory's beseeching, "as afore is sayd" (sig. ee.vi^r). Caxton frames his ending as an extension of authorial presence. But he then draws the production of the book within that authorial orbit, attributing equally translation to Malory ("reduced into Englysshe") and editorial division, chaptering, and printing ("deuyded into XXI bookes, chaptured and enprynted, and fynnyshed") to himself in the same breath (sig. ee.vi^r). The syntax suggests a seamless effort between author, publisher, and press. Even more, Caxton privileges his own work in the process, evident in his final words: "¶Caxton me fieri fecit" - in the voice of the book, "¶Caxton caused me to be made" (sig. ee.vi^r). These words are separated from the main text by a line break, center-justified, the final words the reader sees once they complete the process of reading the book from beginning to end, as Malory suggests they do. (Fig. 2.5) Caxton envelops Malory not to conceal him but as a means of activating the material book and its production as an agent of literary continuity in time.⁶⁴ Caxton's intervention makes it difficult to extricate the book as an

⁶⁴ William Sherman notes this distinction: the "text" (Malory's book) and the "book" (Caxton's) both end here, but in different places. William Sherman, "The beginning of 'The End': 'Double-

object from the narrative it contains. The colophon reinforces the mediating and authoring effects of the prologue and the table, packaging the book and binding it in time for readers.⁶⁵ The emergent editorial features of book, and the influence exerted by the craftsmen who produce them, mark the book as an object embedded in and always moving through time.

Wynkyn de Worde (b.1455 – d.1534), a Dutch immigrant to England and a close associate of William Caxton, inherited Caxton's printing operation in 1495 a few years after Caxton's death in 1491. De Worde continued the work begun by Caxton, extending the reach of printing to wider audiences and expanding its capacities. De Worde produced two editions of *Le Morte*, in 1498 and 1529 respectively, both based on Caxton's edition of 1485.⁶⁶ The three books exhibit close textual affinity – de Worde's interventions are primarily paratextual, adding a series of original woodcuts for the 1498 edition (retaining them and adding a few more in 1529), and shifting the relationship between the prologue and the table of chapter headings. The most striking difference between these editions concerns the latter. De Worde distributes Caxton's chapter headings throughout the main text of Malory's book. If Caxton very consciously frames his identity and interventions as a printer and publisher, using the book as a point of convergence between Malory's authority as an author and his own, de Worde begins a process of effacing that duality in streamlining the paratextual architecture. In both cases, the negotiations of value between author, book, and printer are hashed out in sections that manipulate the readerly

agency' in Caxton's Malory," in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 69.

⁶⁵ In *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, S.H. Steinberg recognizes the intervention Caxton's style of extended colophon make to vernacular printed books. The colophons are "brilliant little essays on the text they follow, and as much part of English literature as of English printing." S.H. Steinberg, *Five Hundred Years of Printing*, New Edition, Rev. John Trevitt (London: The British Library & Oak Knoll Press, 1955/1996), 61.

⁶⁶ 1498 Edition: Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Westminster, 1498. STC 802. John Rylands Library, Manchester. *Rylands*. 1529 Edition: Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, London, 1529. STC 803. British Library, London. *EEBO*.

experience of time, allowing the temporal distance between source and book to expand and contract. De Worde's revisions start to pull the book out of its embeddedness in time, pushing it toward the transcendental continuity of literary history.

De Worde's 1498 edition of *Le Morte* survives in only one copy, held at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England. The copy is incomplete, and begins partway through Caxton's table of chapter headings, at chapter 31 of the eighth book. The table concludes with a simple "¶Explicit Tabula," transitioning quickly to the reprinted prologue of Caxton (sig. viii^v). De Worde's choice to retain the complete table of chapter headings *and* to reproduce those headings at the start of each chapter in the main text is intriguing: his edition seems unable to determine if the structure of the book should be attributed to the author or the printer. James Spisak's response to de Worde's choice is to claim that "the chapter divisions are given more weight than Caxton intended them to have."⁶⁷ But while Spisak's argument is logical, it suffers from an uncomplicated sense of Caxton's initial intentions. As I have argued, Caxton's paratextual architecture performs a substantial intervention into the authorial status of Malory – Caxton invests his editorial energy in framing the readerly experience time as it is narrated by the story and by the book that contains it. De Worde's distribution of chapter headings weakens that printerly identity by taking paratextual architecture and making it appear part of the original text. In much closer proximity to the narrative itself, especially as readers get deep into the book, the identity of the headings as an intervention of the printer fades in favor of a more coherent illusion of authorship and a stabilizing effect on the experience of time.

This effect intensifies in de Worde's 1529 edition, in two ways. First, the paratext and second, the woodcuts. For the 1498 *Le Morte d'Arthur*, de Worde reprinted Caxton's preface

⁶⁷ Spisak, *Caxton's Malory*, 613.

largely unchanged, except for location. While Caxton's 1485 edition ran prologue to table to main text, de Worde's 1498 book switches the order of the first two. The effect is strange: readers encounter a long and detailed table of contents, then a switch to the historiographical prologue, then a switch back to the broader book descriptions. This reordering makes the entryway to the main text awkward for the reader. De Worde resolves some of this awkwardness in the 1529 edition by excising Caxton's prologue altogether. The 1529 book begins with the table of contents, also partial (starting with chapter seven of the fifth book). But after the "¶Explicit Tabula," the 1529 edition reads "¶Here after foloweth the first boke of this present volume" (sig. bbb8^v). (Fig. 2.6) Without the explanation for the chapter headings found in Caxton's prologue, de Worde's edition of 1529 effectively erases Caxton's presence from the entryway into Malory's book. Looking at it from another angle, Malory's authorial presence, which had previously existed in tension with Caxton's paratextual interventions, now remains unchallenged. De Worde's manipulations of table and prologue highlight how paratext, especially paratext at the entrance to a book, frame the relationship to both stories and the objects that contain them.

The second intensification of the stabilizing effect of de Worde's editions emerges in the woodcuts. In his editions of *Le Morte*, de Worde includes woodcuts at the start of each of Caxton's book divisions. In the case of the first book, the initial woodcut introduces the page before the reader encounters the book heading ("here begynneth the fyrst boke..."), the chapter heading ("How Utherpendragon Jent..."), and the main text ("It befell in the days of..."). This initial woodcut fills roughly half of the page space. (Fig. 2.6) It is bordered on three sides by floral patterns and bounded from the text on the bottom by a double line. The woodcut is densely populated, with three pairs of figures. A description from Edward Hodnett's *English Woodcuts*

1480-1535: in the lower left corner stand “a small lady and courtier conversing”; above them. “another couple on a horse riding towards the left”; in the right corner, “a lady being embraced by a king”; there is a city in the back corner, and “a moated castle” on the right side; finally, “thirteen black birds.”⁶⁸ The woodcut does not directly depict the action of the first chapter of *Le Morte*, let alone any individual scene from the first book of Malory’s text. Instead it establishes generic and tropic parameters for the book overall, representing expected settings of action, dialog, and narrative in *Le Morte*. Courtiers and ladies, riding on horseback and encountering each other in front of cities and castles – these depictions remain abstract, allegorical. The woodcut provides readers not with narrative information from the book, but rather with a thematic destination to imagine, a mythical time and space locked in the burdens of expectation and anticipation. De Worde’s addition of the woodcut challenges Caxton’s influence on the book by affording the reader an opportunity to escape the textual conditions of time, capital, and influence. The woodcut creates an imaginative world that ports readers to the transcendent continuity of romance and draws attention up and away from the paratextual markers of the printed book’s material instance in time. Positioned just underneath the page’s title, “The fyrst boke,” the woodcut becomes a metonym for the book’s narrative of knights, ladies, and the operations and challenges of chivalry. It pulls readers through its frame into a world of theme and idea, effacing the insistent materiality of Caxton’s time-object. De Worde’s book stabilizes time, calling our attention away from it and allowing the material book to be swept up by romantic idealization. The addition of the woodcut renders the book a container for representations of time rather than a producer of experiences in it.

⁶⁸ Edward Hodnett, *English Woodcuts 1480-1535* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 309.

Caxton's and de Worde's editions of *Le Morte d'Arthur* speak in two different kinds of paratextual languages. Caxton's operates as a heuristic, front-loading the architecture of Malory's story such that the reader experiences compressed time from the start, slowly extending as they move through the book in continual reference to the frame. De Worde's structuring principle, distributing the chapter headings throughout the book and providing avenues for imaginative escape, stabilizes and organizes the reading experience. James Wade's "The Chapter Headings of the *Morte Darthur*: Caxton and de Worde" is the most sustained critical attention to these particular paratextual features, attempting to better understand "the working practices of these two early editors" and the effect of their choices for headings on reading experience.⁶⁹ Wade spends time unpacking Caxton's "tendency toward lexical repetition" between the headings and the first lines of chapters and sections, mimicking "the verbal texture of Malory's prose," a repetition that "conditions readers for moments of recognition, in which we identify key images or moments already signaled in the headings as such."⁷⁰ Caxton's chapter headings thus work fluidly with his sense of vernacular time across the paratext of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. For Wade, de Worde's alteration in dispersing headings throughout the main text converts the headings from being a "marketing tool or an index" to a feature "integral to the entire reading experience," another resonance of the shift from printerly to authorial presence I have outlined.⁷¹

De Worde formalizes the relationship between writer and printer, releasing the tension that Caxton builds by front-loading his intervention and using it to condition his readers' experience of the text in time. Both printers shape the readerly experience of Malory as one of temporal encounter, alternately expanding and contracting the distance between story, author,

⁶⁹ James Wade, "The Chapter Headings of the *Morte Darthur*: Caxton and de Worde," *Modern Philology* 111, no. 4 (2014): 646.

⁷⁰ Wade, "The Chapter Headings," 650-1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

and material object. While Caxton relishes in the stark juxtapositions his architectural interventions make, de Worde remains more cautious. But lest we interpret his caution as a unilateral privileging of Malory as author, we must recall the last thing readers see in both of his editions: the printer's device. In the 1498 edition, it is Caxton's. In 1529, it is de Worde's own. (Figs. 2.7, 2.8) Like the manipulations of paratext de Worde enacts on Caxton's edition of Malory, the shift to his own device erases Caxton's printerly intervention. But this erasure is only partial. Just as de Worde's device embeds a variation of Caxton's within it, books carry with them the history of their relationships in time. All three of the books I have explored in this section highlight the capacity for the printed object and its networks to influence the reader's experience of time and authority, both transcendent and material. Like the material syllabus of Guillory's canon-making practices, in which the transcendent is always actually cultural, Caxton's oeuvre grounds claims to both historical knowledge and its imaginative escape in the tactile experience of the material book.

A Knight-Transcendent in the Print Shop

The Caxton and de Worde editions of *Le Morte* confront readers with their book-ness. The paratextual architecture of Caxton, and later of de Worde, hybridize the pathways of authority through the book, allowing author and printer to converge in the encounter between the reader and the material object they hold. Little more than a century later, the Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (b.1547 – d.1616) dramatizes this encounter in his novel *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* (hereafter *Don Quixote*). *Don Quixote* follows the adventurous sallies of its titular Don and his sage squire Sancho Panza. Cervantes' book explores

the limits of romance and the economic and cultural ideology that fuels it, particularly in Part I (published in Madrid in 1605). But *Don Quixote* also calls attention to how literary fiction can represent authority in the material networks of books and readers that transact it. This theme emerges acutely in *Don Quixote* Part II, published in 1615 in direct response to the *Segundo Tomo del Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha*, an unauthorized continuation of Cervantes' Part I published in 1614 by the pseudonymous licentiate Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda. By exploring the lineage of authority in these books and their English adaptations, in this section I elaborate on the capacity of books to play out the tensions of humanism as both convergence in time and contestation of value. First, I argue that the moment of peak convergence between *Don Quixote*'s transcendent and material registers comes when, in Part II, Quixote encounters the "false *Quixote*" of Avellaneda in the process of being printed in a Barcelona print shop. Second, I trace the negotiations of authority between Cervantes and Avellaneda in their English printed editions across the seventeenth century. As Anthony J. Cascardi notes, "Cervantes imagines the problem of literary invention as a struggle between authority and innovation."⁷² While such a claim typically prefaces the examination of Cervantes' rich characters and plot structures, this struggle plays out no less vigorously on the actual pages of printed books. In the case of *Don Quixote*, I observe vernacular time in the formation of literary continuity across lines of narrative representation and the material networks of texts as technological objects.

Cervantes' *Don Quixote* begins in the encounter between memory, literary history, and the act of reading. Like Caxton and de Worde before him, Cervantes is clearly a reader of

⁷² Anthony J. Cascardi, "Don Quixote and the invention of the novel," in *The Cambridge Companion to Cervantes*, ed. Anthony J. Cascardi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 63.

romances. And like those early printers, Cervantes is aware of the capacity of the genre, and the medium of its transmission, to shape the readerly experience of time. Quixote's reading of romances in his personal library and his personal memories of their complex adventures convinces him that "he should commence knight-errant, and wander through the world, with his horse and arms, in quest of adventures, and to put in practice whatever he had read to have been practised by knights-errant; redressing all kind of grievances, and exposing himself to danger on all occasions; that by accomplishing such enterprises he might acquire eternal fame and renown."⁷³ In his conviction that his knight-errantry is both needed and timely, Quixote fails to recognize the distance between fiction and reality. Quixote's wholesale mimesis of romantic nostalgia, his actualization of memory in the world, erodes the distinction between past and present: we empathize with his commitment to help, an empathy continually verging on pity as Quixote's mental and emotional world spirals out of sync with his material one. Quixote is convinced that by desiring to exhibit the qualities of knight-errant, and constructing scenarios in which to exercise them, that he actually does. Rather than an instructive metaphor, nostalgia in *Don Quixote* is real, the felt experience of the pain and longing for home. Part I showcases the friction between the transcendent continuity of romance in time and its effects on the lived experience of readers.

Part I follows Quixote in painful detail through the implications of the mismatch of his romantic illusions and his material world.⁷⁴ The famous scene of Quixote "tilting at windmills"

⁷³ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*, trans. Charles Jarvis, ed. by E.C. Riley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

⁷⁴ As Anthony J. Cascardi writes, "the *Quixote* is indeed a comic novel, but that it is a form of comedy that originates in tragedy...the *Quixote* – and, by extension the genre of the novel – takes shape not, or not only, as a parody of epic and romance, but in the comic 'turning' of structures that are potentially tragic in nature." Anthony J. Cascardi, "'Comi-tragedia' in

exemplifies the conflict. Quixote reads the world as romance, a conviction that distorts his actual vision. He sees what he has read, and so windmills become dangerous giants. Sancho's tempering influence ("“Consider, Sir,’ answered Sancho, ‘that those which appear yonder, are not giants, but windmills; and what seem to be arms are the sails, which, whirled about by the wind, make the millstone go’”) does nothing to mitigate Quixote's understanding of the world as a set of narrative tropes: ““One may easily see,’ answered Don Quixote, ‘that you are not versed in the business of adventures: they are giants; and, if you are afraid, get aside and pray, whilst I engage with them in a fierce and unequal combat.’”⁷⁵ By tilting at windmills right at the outset of his adventures, Cervantes' Quixote lets into his material world what we conventionally abstract away from it: the influence of books on our mental and emotional lives. Don Quixote may be an extreme case, but through him Cervantes lays the groundwork for his reflection on the limits of reading as a way of understanding reality and the boundaries between literature, life, and technological mediation in Part II.

With *Don Quixote* Part II, Cervantes examines how stories move from lived experience back to representation in the field of literary production. If Part I explores the content of romance, valorizes it, parodies it, and ultimately deconstructs it, Part II looks to its material existence in the marketplace in pathways of authority and artifice. In the prefatory material of his second part of *Don Quixote*, Cervantes acknowledges the presence of Avellaneda's unauthorized *Segundo Tomo*, and specifically recognizes the person behind Avellaneda as an author in a print marketplace: “for I know very well what the temptations of the devil are, and that one of the greatest is, the putting it into a man's head that he can write and print a book which shall procure

Cervantes: Don Quixote and the Genealogy of the ‘Funny Book’”, *CIEFL Bulletin* 15-16, no. 2-1 (2005): 24.

⁷⁵ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 59.

him as much fame as money, and as much money as fame.”⁷⁶ Here Cervantes mocks Avellaneda’s intentions by pretending to sympathize with them – the fraudulent author has pretensions of fame and wealth, whereas Cervantes couches his literary activity within the privilege and prestige of patronage. Recognizing his complicity in the false book by leaving his Part I open ended with respect to the potential future adventures of Sancho and the Don, Cervantes declares that Part II will leave Quixote “dead and buried” such that “no one may presume to bring fresh accusation against him.”⁷⁷ Cervantes acknowledges that killing Don Quixote narratively is not necessarily the same thing as killing him materially, but he intends to control the result of both. Death allows Cervantes to play with the differing registers of representation, narrative and material, without sacrificing his authorial control.

The drama of Part II crystallizes in the diegetic encounter between Quixote and his character as rendered in a copy of Avellaneda’s book.⁷⁸ In chapter 59, while staying at an inn near Saragossa, Quixote “overheard these words, ‘by your life, Senor Don Jeronimo, while supper is getting ready, let us read another chapter of the *Second Part of Don Quixote of La Mancha*’” (the fraudulent continuation of Cervantes’s story by Avellaneda).⁷⁹ Suddenly Quixote recognizes his existence in two registers at once: in his own material world and as a literary representation within that world. But in the latter, he fails to recognize himself. Quixote becomes

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 466.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 468.

⁷⁸ Quixote already knows about his own authorized literary presence. In the second chapter of Part II, Sancho excitedly approaches Quixote after conversing with a visiting scholar, and shares this news: “the history of your worship is already printed in books under the title of *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*; and he says, it mentions me too by my very name of Sancho Panza, and the lady Dulcinea del Toboso, and several other things which passed between us two only; insomuch that I crossed myself out of pure amazement, to think how the historian who wrote it, could come to know them.” Quixote and Sancho thus hear about the printed edition of Cid Hamete Benengeli, the historiographer whose work sources Cervantes’ Part I. Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 483.

⁷⁹ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 852.

a contradiction. Confronted with a version of himself that is untrue and unauthorized, he is his own negation. But in the same moment he fulfills the narrative potential expressed in Part I, literally becoming what he emulated: a knight-errant in a book. Cervantes relishes in the opportunity to play with his own literary authority in this moment. Don Jeronimo endorses the “real” Quixote standing in front of him over and above the “fictional” Quixote on the printed page he holds: “the north and morning star of knight-errantry, maugre and in despite of him, who has endeavoured to usurp your name, and annihilate your exploits, as the author of this book I here give you has done.”⁸⁰ To make good on this endorsement, and to exercise his own canonicity, Quixote must literally overwrite the actions of the false Quixote in Avellaneda’s book with his own. Don John describes “how the new history related, that Don Quixote, whoever he was, had been there at the running of the ring,” referring to a tournament in which Quixote competes in Avellaneda’s book.⁸¹ Quixote’s response is to “not set a foot in Saragossa,” and in so altering his narrative path “expose to the world, the falsity of this modern historiographer.”⁸² Roger Chartier notes the complexity of the time lines in play here: “Cervantes ‘falsifies’ Avellaneda’s account by describing what the sequel writer had presented as an already completed past as a future that would never come to pass. And indeed, Quixote does not go to Saragossa but to Barcelona.”⁸³ Quixote now must protect his own reputation in the real world and manage the representation of his adventures in any future instance of their fictional representation. In this episode, Cervantes switches his approach to the exploration of the legacy of Don Quixote, and *Don Quixote*. No longer tethered to the nostalgia and memory of stories

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 853.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 855.

⁸² *Ibid*, 855.

⁸³ Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 40.

ensconced in his personal library, Don Quixote is now subject to the emergent material networks of books in the print marketplace.

In Barcelona, Cervantes' play of literary and material continuity intensifies. Cervantes casts Don Quixote in a self-fulfilling fable about the intersections of literary ambition and the popular literary marketplace. In chapter 62 of Part II, Quixote "had a mind to walk about the town, without ceremony" and ends up at a printing house. Since he is now in print, and "had never seen any printing," he wants to know how it works. He sees workers "drawing off the sheets in one place, correcting in another, composing in this, revising in that; in short, all the machinery to be seen in great printing houses."⁸⁴ He commends the printers on printing virtuous books, because "there are abundance of sinners up and down, and so many benighted persons stand in need of an infinite number of lights."⁸⁵ He then turns to the correction process of another book, the title of which is the *Second Part of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha*, Avellaneda's false *Quixote*. Quixote's reaction is strong, acknowledging that he knows "something of that book" but that "in truth and on my conscience, [he] thought it had been burnt before now, and reduced to ashes, for its impertinence."⁸⁶ Cervantes confronts us with a powerful image of destruction at the very point of generation and emergence. The print shop destabilizes the continuity of the identity Don Quixote as much as the book *Don Quixote* by introducing competing versions of both into the marketplace. If literary representation is what brings fiction to life in the world, then Quixote's destructive impulse is a powerful form of self-harm, extending the "constant confusion between book and body" identified by Georgina Dopico

⁸⁴ Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, 878.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 880.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 880.

Black, in which both are imbued with “gravity, weighing them with history.”⁸⁷ When Quixote enters the print shop, he focuses readers on the printed book as a suspension of transcendent literary continuity and technological networks. He encounters together the spirit and the texture of his own literary existence. In short, he calls our attention to vernacular time.

In the print shop episode, Cervantes reveals himself to be substantially more invested in the implications of his fiction than he was in Part I. Avellaneda’s false *Quixote* must have had a hand in this. If, as E.T. Aylward points out, Avellaneda’s “modest goal was simply to write another funny book,” then Cervantes certainly recognized an opportunity to do *more* with his sequel, and took it.⁸⁸ Rather than its capacity for play, Avellaneda is acutely anxious about the dangers of reading and, by extension, print. In Avellaneda’s book, reading outside of the safe spaces of devotional books and saint’s lives is a conduit for personal corruption and societal erosion. At the start, Quixote forgets “the chimera of the knights-errant” and through the lessons of his devotional books is “restored to his former judgment and released from imprisonment.”⁸⁹ He even starts going to mass. Avellaneda specifically implicates printing (and the distribution it makes possible) in the dangers of relapse. Quixote’s reputation hinges upon his bad reading: “but because of having taken to reading too many of the deceitful books of chivalry which are being printed, and believing them to be true, he has become so addled that he has left his home, fancying he is a knight-errant.”⁹⁰ Avellaneda picks up the thread of Cervantes’ Part I, the

⁸⁷ Georgina Dopico Black, “Canons Afire: Libraries, Books, and Bodies in Don Quixote’s Spain” in *Cervantes’ Don Quixote: A Casebook*, ed. Roberto González Echevarría (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 116.

⁸⁸ E.T. Aylward, *Towards a Revaluation of Avellaneda’s False Quixote* (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 1989), 19.

⁸⁹ Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *Don Quixote de la Mancha (Part II): Being the spurious continuation of Miguel de Cervantes’ Part I*, trans. and ed. Alberta Wilson Server and John Esten Keller (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 1980), 8.

⁹⁰ Avellaneda, *Don Quixote*, 275-6.

romantic continuity with the past exemplified in the conflicted but endearing character of Quixote, and grinds him into the dirt, reducing him to a pathetic madman. Avellaneda sends Quixote to the asylum, surrounded by inmates emblematic of the author's own anxiety about print and its potential to threaten orthodoxy (one inmate warns Quixote "Sir, don't believe a person in this house, for there is no more truth in any of them than in something printed in Calvinist Geneva").⁹¹ By facilitating an encounter between himself and his fraudulent printed version in Part II of Cervantes' book, and roundly denouncing the latter, the "real" Quixote contains Avellaneda and the disruptive effects of his spurious continuation. This is an assertion of authorial control, on the one hand, but it is also a revealing problem on the other: the lengths Cervantes has to go to in controlling the lineage of his fiction expose the capacity of books themselves to shape the readerly experience of literary authority as it stretches, expands, and ultimately breaks in time. Quixote and *Quixote* find themselves square in the middle of tug of war between spirit and texture.

For Cervantes, as with Caxton and de Worde, the book represents the interface of literary time and the networks of the material art world. Just as *Don Quixote* Parts I and II surround Avellaneda's continuation, the English Cervantine tradition, and especially the lineage of Avellaneda in English translation, plays with the tension between continuity and dispersal. There were several editions of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* produced in English during the seventeenth century, beginning with Thomas Shelton's 1612 translation of Part I and 1620 edition of Part II.⁹² But Avellaneda's book was not printed in English until 1705, edited and translated by

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 343.

⁹² Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The history of the valorous and vvittie knight-errant, Don-Quixote of the Mancha Translated out of the Spanish*, London, 1612. STC 4915. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. EEBO; Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The second part of the history of the valorous and witty knight-errant, Don Quixote of the Mancha. Written in Spanish by*

Captain John Stevens.⁹³ Stevens' Avellaneda succeeds his own two-volume edition of Cervantes' *Don Quixote* published in 1700 (which updated and revised Shelton's editions).⁹⁴ Stevens' edition of Avellaneda, however, cannot claim Avellaneda's original from 1614 as its source. Instead it is translated from a heavily interpolated French version of the Spanish book, composed by Alain-René Lesage and printed in Paris in 1704.⁹⁵ Lesage's edition is practically a different book, changing the structure and organization of chapters, the content of the main text, and the entire ending sequence. Lesage's influence on the English lineage of Avellaneda is strong, as Stevens' English text became the source for the two other eighteenth-century editions, Mr. Baker's of 1745 (STC 89687) and William Augustus Yardley's of 1784 (STC 89688). Each of these fail to acknowledge their debts to the French source on their title pages, claiming only to have been translated into English from Spanish.⁹⁶ A version of Avellaneda translated into

Michael Ceruantes: and now translated into English, London, 1620. STC 4917. Huntington Library, San Marino, CA. EEBO.

⁹³ Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *A continuation of the Comical History of the most Ingenious Knight, Don Quixote De la Mancha, by the licenciado Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda*, London, 1705. STC 89686. New York Public Library, NY. *HathiTrust*. Beyond being unprinted, Avellaneda remained largely unknown in England. In *Cervantes in Seventeenth-Century England*, Dale Randall and Jackson Boswell note that in the preface to an anonymous 1699 abridged version of *Don Quixote*, the author acknowledges that "a spurious Second Part, of little Worth and of which Abuse in many Absurdities the Author complains, did peep abroad" between Cervantes' I and II. Dale Randall and Jackson Boswell, *Cervantes in Seventeenth-Century England: The Tapestry Turned*, ed. Dale B.J. Randall and Jackson C. Boswell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 615.

⁹⁴ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The history of the most ingenious knight Don Quixote de la Mancha written in Spanish by Michael de Cervantes Saavedra*. London, 1700. WING C1773A. Harvard University Library, Cambridge, MA. EEBO.

⁹⁵ Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *Nouvelles aventures de l'admirable Don Quichotte de la Manche, Compose'es par le Licenciado Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda*, Paris, 1704. Bibliotheque nationale de France, Paris. *Gallica*.

⁹⁶ Yardley's 1784 edition does note on its final page that the ending sequence "originates with the French translator," the only reference of its kind. Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *A continuation of the history and adventures of the renowned Don Quixote de la Mancha. Written originally in Spanish, by the licenciado Alonzo Fernandez de Avellaneda*, London, 1784. STC 89688. Harvard University Library, Cambridge, MA. *HathiTrust*, 252.

English from the original Spanish would not appear until the Swaffham edition of 1805 (based on an updated text by Don Isidro Perrales y Torres, published in Madrid in 1732).⁹⁷ This interwoven lineage suggests that as much as Cervantes and Avellaneda play with dynamics of authority, memory, and time in the stories they tell, the books they engender and inspire continue this play entirely outside of their control. Like Dante's *Commedia* and the Caxton and de Worde editions of Malory's Middle English *Le Morte*, these vernacular books exist in time, in conversation with their lineage both as it extends established literary authority and as it marks emergent vernacular practices. Like *mamma* to progeny, these books connect across transcendent and material registers, implicating our experience of literary time as much as the local contingencies constraining composition, editing, and publishing.

I locate the tension between literary continuity and material network in two specific paratextual examples from Stevens' 1705 edition of Avellaneda. By manipulating the reader's access to the main narrative through altering titles and subtitles as well as chapter headings, the Stevens' edition hybridizes authority in the mode of Caxton. The first title the reader sees on the title page is "A Continuation Of the Comical History of the moſt Ingenious Knight, Don Quixote De La Mancha" (to which is added "Never before Printed in Engliſh", reminding readers of its originality). Stevens' main title is largely unprecedented, distinguishing the book from earlier editions of Cervantes' two parts in English, as well as from its putative source (Avellaneda's own Spanish text) and its actual source (Lesage's French edition).⁹⁸ Titles are, of course, not

⁹⁷ Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *The life and exploits of the ingenious gentleman, Don Quixote, de la Mancha : containing his fourth sally, and the fifth part of his adventures*, Swaffham, London, 1805. University of California. *HathiTrust*.

⁹⁸ Shelton 1612 edition of Cervantes' Part I bears the title "The History of the Valorovs and Wittie Knight-Errant, Don Qvixote Of the Mancha." His 1620 Part II reads "The Second Part of the History of the Valorous and witty Knight-Errant, Don Quixote of the Mancha." The Spanish editions of Avellaneda bear the titles "Segvndo Tomo del Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Qvixote de la

necessarily a perfect gauge of the content they precede or the authority and authenticity of the books they introduce. But what is interesting in this case is that while Stevens' primary title clearly marks his Avellaneda apart from the rest of the English Cervantine tradition, he reorients his readers back toward Cervantes with a secondary title right at the juncture between paratext and main text, at the top of the page before the heading of chapter 1: "The Delightful History of the most Ingenious Knight Don Quixote De La Mancha." Stevens follows the English Cervantine tradition of Shelton, whose 1612 translation of *Don Quixote* includes a secondary title in this position as well: "The Delightfvll History of the Most Ingeniovs Knight Don-Quixote of the Mancha." (Fig. 2.9, 2.10) Stevens' Avellaneda thus stands between distinction and assimilation, marking itself apart in one place while conforming to the authority of tradition in another. The "authorized" version of the title connects Avellaneda to Cervantes through Shelton. Stevens could have chosen to adopt an English version of Lesage's title (*Nouvelles Aventures De L'Admirable Don Quichotte de la Manche*), but instead he pulls Avellaneda back within the purview of the authorial tradition from which it initially departed. That this secondary title is the last thing the reader sees before beginning to read Avellaneda's text reasserts Cervantes' authority, demonstrating the play with time and cultural capital I have claimed for vernacular art.

If Stevens' choices in titling inflect the book's position relative to its own lineage, his manipulations of the readerly interface of chapter headings and main text intensify the stakes. As mentioned above, Lesage's Avellaneda is more of an interpretation than a translation. In introducing Avellaneda to the English book market in the form of a translation of Lesage,

Mancha" (1614) and "Vida, y Hechos del Ingenioso Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha" (1732). Title pages for both books are reproduced in Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, *El Quijote apócrifo: compuesto por el licenciado Alonso Fernandez de Avellaneda*, Barcelona, 1905. Pennsylvania State University. *HathiTrust*. Lesage's French edition reads "Nouvelles Aventures De L'Admirable Don Quichotte de la Manche" (1704).

Stevens 1705 book is doubly spurious – it translates a loose adaptation of a fraudulent original. This is the fundamental logic of the vernacular book: just as with Caxton and de Worde, Stevens’ Avellaneda highlights the book as an object of accrual in time, aware of its seams and drawing varied lineages into temporary constellations of authority. This erosion of authority would seem to contradict the pull toward tradition analyzed in the use of subtitles above. But the chapter headings that introduce Chapter 1 challenge this assumption. Avellaneda’s original frames the interface of reader and main text paradoxically as a departure through return: “how Don Quixote de la Mancha returns to his knight-errantry fantasies and certain knights from Granada come to his village of Argamesilla.”⁹⁹ The return to knight-errantry paradoxically marks a departure relative to the “healing” Quixote experiences at the end of Cervantes’ Part I. Avellaneda intensifies his project of departure in the first lines of Chapter 1 following the heading: “The sage Alisolán, a modern no less than true historian, says that after....”¹⁰⁰ In creating Alisolán, a new Arab historiographer in contrast to Cervantes’ own Cid Hamete Benengeli, Avellaneda clearly separates his history from Cervantes. But in describing his historian as modern *and* true, Avellaneda reveals an investment in authorizing himself within that contrast.

Lesage’s French heading for Chapter 1 and Stevens’ corresponding English one, however, consciously reintroduce the authority of Cervantes’ original *Don Quixote* to Avellaneda’s continuation. Lesage’s French text alters not only the original chapter heading, but also the first lines, more clearly associating Avellaneda and Cervantes. The French chapter heading reads “Où il eſt parlé d’un autre Arabe que Benengely. Succés de l’emprifonnement de

⁹⁹ Avellaneda, *Don Quixote*, 7. The Spanish of the 1732 edition reads “De como don Quixote de la Mancha volvió á sus desvanecimientos de caballero andante, y de la venida á su lugar del Argamesilla ciertos caballeros granadinos.” Avellaneda, *El Quijote apócrifo*, 8.

¹⁰⁰ Avellaneda, 7. The Spanish reads: “El sabio Alisolán, historiador no menos moderno que verdadero, dize que.” Avellaneda, *El Quijote apócrifo*, 8.

Don Quichotte dans la cage,” which Stevens translates as “*Which mentions another Arabian beſides Benengeli, and treats of the Succeſs of Don Quixote’s Imprifonment in the Cage.*”¹⁰¹ The first lines of the chapter continue: “The Wife Alifolan, an Hiſtorian as faithful as *Benengeli*, gives an Account in his Memoires....”¹⁰² (Fig. 2.11) In his English text, Stevens surrounds Avellaneda’s narrative intervention, Alisolán, literally containing him within the Cervantine authority of Cid Hamete Benengeli. In both cases, the text introduces Alisolán to the reader only in relation to the prior authority (“another Arabian” and “as faithful as Benengeli”). In the English tradition, Avellaneda and Cervantes stand in uneasy tension – while Stevens clearly marks his edition of Avellaneda apart from other texts in the *Don Quixote* tradition, he explicitly manipulates the English lineage of Cervantes into a position of containment. Randall and Boswell note that in the Preface to his edition of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* in 1700, Stevens prides himself on translating “from the Spanish Original, and not from the French.”¹⁰³ He claims authority in proximity to the source. Yet, five years later, his Avellaneda presents readers with the illusion of authority pieced together in fragments and mediated in the logic of the book. The English Avellaneda doubles back on itself, like Wynkyn de Worde’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, destabilizing the lineage of the original author through its publication history while reconstituting that authority in the act of setting up the interface between reader and text.

Don Quixote in all his inflections explores the intersections of fiction and reality, emblematic of the spirit of his age and mired in the material texture of his reproduction of the past. In his sense of play, Don Quixote is both entertainment and instruction, evidenced by the

¹⁰¹ Avellaneda, *Nouvelles aventures*, 1; Avellaneda, *A continuation*, 1705, 1.

¹⁰² Avellaneda, *A continuation*, 1705, 1. The French: “Le ſage Alifolan, Hiſtorian auffi fidele que Benengely, rapporte en ſes memoires...” Avellaneda, *Nouvelles aventures*, 1.

¹⁰³ Randall and Boswell, *Cervantes*, 631.

balance of “delightful” and “history” in the English titles, for instance. As Erich Auerbach claims in his famous essay “The Enchanted Dulcinea”:

Don Quijote’s feelings are genuine and profound. Dulcinea is really the mistress of his thoughts; he is truly filled with the spirit of a mission which he regards as man’s highest duty. He is really true, brave, and ready to sacrifice everything. So unconditional a feeling and so unconditional a determination impose admiration even though they are based on a foolish illusion, and this admiration has been accorded to Don Quijote by almost all readers.¹⁰⁴

For Auerbach, the strength and sincerity of his ideals makes Quixote real. He becomes the heroic ideal he desires to be, both for himself and for his audience as his books move through time.

Auerbach’s claim is romantic, and seductive. Franz Kafka, however, strips this idealism down to its operative delusion in a short narrative fragment titled “The Truth About Sancho Panza.” In Kafka, Quixote the character retreats entirely into fancy: Sancho, “by feeding him a great number of romances of chivalry and adventure in the evening and night hours,” diverts himself from “his demon, whom he later called Don Quixote, that this demon thereupon set out, uninhibited, on the maddest exploits.”¹⁰⁵ Is Quixote an authentic ideal rendered narratively real and truly felt, or merely a container for the delusions of literary continuity in time? When we read him, are we “true, brave, and ready to sacrifice everything” or just feeding our demons? The question may seem flippant, but it resonates in a world in which the pursuit of literary history through academic study in the humanities depends upon the semantics of value, utility, and interpretations of enrichment via increased visibility of technological mediation. *Don Quixote*,

¹⁰⁴ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 343.

¹⁰⁵ Franz Kafka, “The Truth About Sancho Panza,” in *The Great Wall of China: Stories and Reflections*, trans. Willa and Edward Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1946).

like *Le Morte d'Arthur* before it, confronts readers with the tension between spirit and texture that defines the historical project of humanism. As Alban Forcione puts it, Cervantes' conceptual and narrative experiments make visible "the spiritual heritage of humanism."¹⁰⁶ The Avellaneda and its complicated relationship to the English Cervantine tradition teaches that the value humanists build in and around their fictions is always also grounded in the manipulation of things, in alternating currents of literary compression and technological expansion. The paratexts of early printed books make the dynamics of spirit and texture highly visible, training our attention on their enduring legacy in the contemporary literary and academic marketplace.

¹⁰⁶ Alban K. Forcione, *Cervantes and the Humanist Vision: A Study of Four Exemplary Novels* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 27-8.

CHAPTER 3

COMICS, CAPITAL, AND CONTINUITY: READING THE PAST IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Ms. Marvel, a comic book series created by G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona in 2014, teaches an important lesson about its medium: comic books are time machines, capable of transporting readers to the past along pathways of memory, desire, and nostalgia and pushing readers into the future through new and novel ways of reading and knowing. *Ms. Marvel*'s first two issues manifest the burden of serial storytelling across time and media in the physical body of series protagonist Kamala Khan. Khan simultaneously evokes her heroic namesake (Ms. Marvel) within Marvel Comics continuity *and* confronts that legacy with the changing needs of her contemporary surroundings. As Khan transitions from citizen to superhero, she develops conventional superpowers like shape-shifting, increased strength, and rapid healing. But, more importantly, she embodies the tension between continuity, disruption, and mediation in the logic of the book. At first, Khan's heroic body visually cites the previous Ms. Marvel, Carol Danvers, who has worn the mantle since 1977. Danvers is conventionally tall, blonde, and fair skinned. Kamala Khan, by contrast, is a Pakistani-American teenager with a small frame, dark hair, and brown skin (see their stark visual differences in Figure 3.1). In first becoming Ms. Marvel, Khan assumes the likeness of Danvers, a pull back toward comics past and the conventions of the superhero genre. But as she gains confidence in her newfound abilities, she evolves a heroic identity reflecting her own unique circumstances as a Muslim teen. Khan's body dramatizes not just her changing life (balancing expectations of family, faith, school, and the Avengers) but also the changing position of comics in American culture. Khan is at once allegorized and embedded in the world. As she physically struggles to accommodate the legacy of continuity, *Ms. Marvel*'s

representation of cultural diversity symbolically reaches out to readerships not traditionally associated with American superhero comics – young women, and especially young Muslim women. *Ms. Marvel* labors under a dual weight, both symbolic and literal. In Khan's transforming body, nostalgia and progress converge through competing sets of narrative, visual, and readerly expectations. This is the form's intervention in time.

Ms. Marvel's exploration of time, continuity, and mediation plays on both narrative and technological levels. Wilson and Alphona emphasize the temporal friction between the old Ms. Marvel and the new by allowing both Carol Danvers and Kamala Khan to exist at once on the page. In the series' second issue, a striking set of panels depicts Khan in her polar states, Danvers in the upper portion and Khan in the lower.¹ (Fig. 3.2) But the background upon which these panels rest is less stable, confronting readers with a form somewhere between Danvers and Khan. Her body, unsure of its place on the space of the page, stretches and contorts outside the boundaries of the frame. Comics suspends the past and the future in present negotiations of embodied mediation. As Khan's body adapts to its new abilities, the old Ms. Marvel and the new ripple back and forth like a chameleon changing its skin. Her body reconciles two simultaneous identities, one defined by legacy and one by potential. This narrative tension allegorizes the series' pathways through its publication network. For example, the print edition of *Ms. Marvel* #1 went into more than half a dozen printings, a marker of popularity unusual for a book that represented a creative risk for Marvel. But at the time of its release in 2014 the first issue was *also* Marvel's best-selling digital comic book.² Digital comics have found popularity among new

¹ G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, "All Mankind," *Ms. Marvel* vol. 3 no. 2 (New York: Marvel Comics, May 2014).

² Stephen Gerding, "'Ms. Marvel' rockets to the #1 slot on Marvel's digital sales chart," *Comic Book Resources*, February 10, 2014, <http://robot6.comicbookresources.com/2014/02/ms-marvel-rockets-to-the-1-slot-on-marvels-digital-sales-chart/>.

readerships not habituated to (and perhaps uncomfortable in) traditional comics culture environments, like conventions and specialty shops. *Ms. Marvel*'s challenge to the history of comic books and graphic novels is rooted in an emergent alignment of narrative continuity, growing audience, and the forms of technological mediation required to connect them. *Ms. Marvel* shows comics evolving in transcendent and material registers, and I argue that Kamala Khan is at once convergence and contest. On the one hand, her body on the page actualizes the continuity of heroic mantle that has been the hallmark of serial storytelling in the superhero genre since its emergence in the 1930s. On the other, she marks a powerful disruption in the historical narrative of superhero comics as it has been defined by mechanical reproduction and masculine idealization.

Ms. Marvel's embodiment of and challenge to superhero continuity highlights the metonymic relationship between discrete fragments and synthetic wholes that is a hallmark of comics storytelling, from the structural relationship of panels and pages to the multi-franchise crossover events favored by the major publishers. But *Ms. Marvel* pushes on this logic, blurring the boundaries that traditionally separate stories from their readers by aligning itself so closely with its audience's need for narrative and cultural representation. The series manipulates the expectations of continuity to interrogate how it both conceals and exposes identity. As *Ms. Marvel*, Kamala Khan represents the struggle between the transcendental continuity of the superheroic ideal and the changing material conditions of the present. Forged against the violence of physical, cultural, and technological change, Khan's body traces the mutable contours of comic book history. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, technological mediation allows art to interface the authority of the past and produce knowledge in the present moment, organizing and dispersing each through varied cultural pathways. In *Ms. Marvel* readers

follow these threads of continuity as they have defined comics, mediation more broadly, and (bigger still) the negotiations of cultural capital that have shaped how humanists study the intersection of time and value. In both form and content, comics narrates the historical arc of humanism as inflected by technological mediation, extending its balance of transcendent continuity and material network by teaching how to read the past in the digital age.

In this chapter, I argue that comics manipulates time and genre, challenging the cultural habit of using them as markers of value. On the level of format, comics retains the traces of its industrial past and the vulgarity of its lineage while infiltrating middle-brow culture by way of the graphic novel and the form of the book. On the level of narrative, comics invites reading that sequences the past in streams of memory and harnesses discrete elements of space and time to erode distinctions in value. I explore this tension through comic books and graphic novels themselves as well as their rhetorical constructions in the emergent academic field of comics studies. In the first part of the chapter, I parse the framing of cultural capital in the work of two prominent comics scholars, Bart Beaty and Hillary Chute. Beaty and Chute represent two approaches to the critical study of comics: drawing the conventions of scholarly writing and publishing toward the populist history of the medium on the one hand, and drawing comics toward the conventional concerns of history, art, and literary studies on the other. In the second part of the chapter, I apply my approach to the transactions of cultural capital and literary time through the work of two comics creators: Richard McGuire and Chris Ware. Both highlight continuities and discontinuities that connect story and format in time, contrasting an architectural relationship to time and space with an emotional one and recasting the interaction between story, page, and reader. These creators call on readers to remember the material history of the objects they hold while anticipating changes in the digital futures of reading. In the last part of this

chapter I illustrate how vernacularity and authority flow downstream toward more popular iterations of comics culture. The comic book serial *Saga*, written by Brian K. Vaughan and drawn by Fiona Staples, recasts nostalgia as lineage, acknowledging both the generic and genetic relationships of comics history in time by blurring the boundaries between high and mass art. Time defines comics, rendered both transcendent (in the form's convoluted pathways of continuity and serial storytelling) and material (in its legacy within the industrial production of mass art and technological mediation). In their most basic function, comic books like *Saga* teach humanists how to read through time.

Comics Scholarship as a Mirror of Its Object

Contemporary comics scholarship has struggled to move beyond gatekeeping questions of legitimization, and in this section I examine closely the rhetorical and material factors contributing to this struggle by looking at the critical work of Bart Beaty and Hillary Chute. On the one hand, critics like Beaty, in *Comics versus Art*, observe a battle between two art worlds: “the comics world remains a challenge to the art world, a distinct field of creative endeavor that is still only tentatively welcomed.”³ Beaty points to the relationships of “memory, allegiance, and judgment” that have contributed to what he calls the “ongoing symbolic exclusion of comics from the domain of consecrated art.”⁴ While Beaty gestures toward an indefinite point in the future when these barriers of exclusion might be overcome, his interest remains in exploring his titular binary. In contrast, Hillary Chute actively draws the medium into the realm of literary

³ Bart Beaty, *Comics versus Art* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2012), 13. In theorizing “art worlds” Beaty draws on the work of Howard S. Becker. Specifically, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982; 2008).

⁴ Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 7.

value by highlighting the features of comics most legible to traditional scholars of the book. In “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative,” published in *PMLA*, Chute claims that “today’s most enduring graphic narratives,” which are those “serious, imaginative works that explored social and political realities by stretching the boundaries of a historically mass medium,” are ripe for academic study led forward by “autobiography, arguably the dominant mode of current graphic narrative.”⁵ Chute finds within a particular strain of comics and cartooning a set of generic allegiances that engage the concerns of the wider literary academy, and uses that strain as a justification for study of the medium overall. “Comics as Literature?” is a powerful statement of the arrival of comics into the mainstream academy, but it plays into the prejudices of its intended audience too easily. Beaty and Chute represent two modes in which comics inhabit the academy: challenge and emulation.⁶ And they present their claims as metaphors of gestation – comics will eventually do and be something that they are not fully being and doing now. As these convictions mature in subsequent books, Beaty and Chute reveal the extent to which comics scholarship mirrors the cultural perception of the objects of its

⁵ Hillary Chute, “Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative,” *PMLA* 123, no. 2 (2008): 456.

⁶ As challenge, comics scholarship has a rich tradition of exploring the boundaries between low and high art. See, for examples, W.T.J. Mitchell, “Comics as Media,” *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 3 (2014): 255-265; Katalin Orban, “A Language of Scratches and Stiches,” *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 3 (2014): 169-181; Joseph Witek, *Comic Books as History: The Narrative Art of Jack Jackson, Art Spiegelman, and Harvey Pekar* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989); David Carrier, *The Aesthetics of Comics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), especially pg. 84-85; Henry Jenkins, “Introduction,” in *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*, ed. Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan, 1-14 (New York: Routledge, 2012); Vanessa Russell, “The Mild-Mannered Reporter: How Clark Kent Surpassed Superman,” in *The Contemporary Comic Book Superhero*, ed. Angela Ndalians, 216-232 (New York: Routledge, 2009). As emulation, comics scholarship at times elides the distinction between low and high art. See for examples Jason Tondro, *Superheroes of the Round Table: Comics Connections to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2011); Rocco Versaci, *This Book Contains Graphic Language: Comics As Literature* (New York: Continuum, 2007); William Duffy, “Sing Muse, of the Immortal Hero: Using Epic to Understand Comic Books,” *IJOCA* 8, no. 1 (2006): 258-271.

scrutiny, even as comics and graphic novels themselves play with vernacular time and cultural capital in more subtle ways.

Twelve Cent Archie, Beaty's most strident challenge to the legitimizing strain of comics scholarship, enters the academic field paradoxically: it carries the symbolic weight of its author – an author of a half dozen books on comics and an evangelist of the form's academic integrations – while arguing for increased attention to the material populism of the comics world. *Twelve Cent Archie* transgresses the expectations of an academic book published by a university press. For instance, it contains no footnotes or endnotes (its only real concession to standard practices of academic publishing is the inclusion of an index to help sort through the many names and characters the book addresses). But its real break from tradition is its structuring principle: *Twelve Cent Archie* is a series of 100 short chapters, more brief meditations, on some aspect of the art, history, style, or impact of *Archie* comics from a decade-long period around the 1960s. The book's structure highlights Beaty's claim in its introduction that "the field of comics has simply sought to duplicate the canon-erecting tendencies of the literary hierarchy," and that "scholars have focused nearly exclusively on those works that can be most easily reconciled within the traditions of literary greatness."⁷ For Beaty, "comics studies has a long history of misunderstanding and misrepresenting the contributions of the past" – a point that he makes in his analyses of *Archie* and also reinforces in the format of his book.⁸ The quick cut jokes and mass appeal of the stories Beaty explores bleeds into the strictly refereed space of the academic monograph. *Twelve Cent Archie* calls attention to the challenge comic books and graphic novels pose to the canons of legitimacy in the academic world. Beaty's book interrogates the conditions

⁷ Bart Beaty, *Twelve Cent Archie* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 5.

⁸ Beaty, *Twelve Cent Archie*, 6.

of value that have historically determined the shape and scope of the academic book – an interrogation that reflects the cultural work of the book’s subject.

While Beaty rethinks the format of the academic book in a way more responsive to its content, much comics scholarship approaches things from the other direction. Hillary Chute’s most recent book, *Disaster Drawn*, rethinks its subject (comics and graphic novels of war and trauma) in alignment with the conventions of academic monographs. The book is substantial, theoretically and historically detailed, heavily noted: Chute finds in comics the weight and witness of history, and reproduces it in her book. Chute writes “‘materializing’ history through the work of marks on the page creates it as space and substance, gives it a corporeality, a physical shape – like a suit, perhaps, for an absent body, or to make evident the kind of space-time many bodies move in and move through; to make, in other words, the twisting lines of history legible through form.”⁹ This is powerful academic prose, and Chute’s claim speaks to the capacity for comics to afford access to and through literary and cultural history. Chute’s book, published through a subsidiary of Harvard University Press, is a beautiful object. Color accents define header and footer, full-page color images from the comic books and graphic novels she covers add richness to the analysis, and close to 100 pages of notes deepen the experience for the reader. These formal details lend the book the weight of authority in the academic marketplace. It is as if the physical instance of the book contributes to Chute’s claim that its subjects can address with gravitas the great traumas of the twentieth century: holocaust, nuclear annihilation, religious and civil strife in the Middle East. *Disaster Drawn*, in both form and content, fulfills the prediction Chute outlined in her 2008 article for *PMLA*. Chute’s article and book create a

⁹ Hillary Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2016), 27.

system of legitimation, using the prestige of academic publishing to parse the project of historical witness and documentation engaged in by a small set of comics genres.

Chute's writing in *Disaster Drawn* and "Comics as Literature?" is a powerful testament to the capacity for comics to prompt inspired textual and historical analysis, but remains vulnerable to charges by Beaty of perpetuating a pattern of "cultural cherry-picking."¹⁰ Like Beaty (and Pierre Bourdieu before him), I agree that the value of comic books and graphic novels "fluctuates, not because of what they are, but because of what they can be made to do" as he and Benjamin Woo put it in *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time*.¹¹ But Like Chute, I recognize in them the legacy of influence within the paradigm of canon-making in literary time. Comic books and graphic novels inhabit a space of convergence between control of the literary imagination and the conditions of labor and mass production, and that convergence has implications for their academic study. As Charles Hatfield puts it, comics scholarship amounts to a "tug-of-war between conflicting impulses: on the one hand, the nigh-on irresistible urge to codify the workings of the form; on the other, a continual delight in the form's ability to frustrate any airtight analytical scheme."¹² Comics scholars might take a stronger hint from their objects of study, which consistently resist any form of taxonomic classification and operate without any sense of disciplinary allegiance.¹³ William Kuskin frames the issue persuasively: "such is the

¹⁰ Beaty, *Twelve Cent Archie*, 5.

¹¹ Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo, *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time: Symbolic Capital and the Field of American Comic Books* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 122.

¹² Charles Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: an emerging literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), xiv.

¹³ Despite this claim, much of the energy of comics studies historically has been spent in trying to classify the form or parse its disciplinary debts. For examples of the former, see practitioner models like Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994); Will Eisner, *Comics and Sequential Art: Principles and Practices from the Legendary Cartoonist* (Tamarac: Poorhouse Press, 1985), academic linguistic work like Neil Cohn, *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images* (London:

particular irony of the field: observing fluidity – the possibilities inherent in the page, the play of imagination in the gutter, the anthologizing process of print, the ways influence and commerce contribute to artistic legacy – much comics criticism nevertheless hews to category.”¹⁴ Comics like *Ms. Marvel* call us toward Kuskin’s sense of play, resisting the binary of challenge and emulation and synthesizing something more powerful between nostalgia for the past and the shaping of the future. In these examples, comics asserts itself as a medium capable of recasting the conditions of literary value and its dynamics across time that have historically led to canons and margins. Comics animates the past in acts of present reading, triggering a powerful nostalgia that renovates traditional narratives of canonical influence.

Largely because of their popular history, comic books and graphic novels resist the strict separation of cultural capital from financial capital that has been the pattern with literature and the arts. Comics has long been a commercial medium, from newspapers to newsstands to comic shops to Hollywood. Its vulgarity has often rendered it a marker used to distinguish good taste from bad. As Jared Gardner tells the story, in the 1950s when New Criticism was dominating the academic study of literature, “‘comic book’ became an adjective to describe not only the lowest

Bloomsbury, 2014); Barbara Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments* (Rochester: RIT Press, 2013), and cultural-historical work like David Kunzle, *The Early Comic Strip: Narrative Strips and Picture Stories in the European Broadsheet from c. 1450 to 1825* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Jean-Paul Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*, trans. Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2010). For examples of scholarship questioning disciplinarity, see Neil Cohn, “Building a better ‘comic theory’,” *Studies in Comics* 5, no. 1 (2014): 57-77; Cohn, “Un-Defining ‘Comics’,” *IJOCA* 7, no. 2 (2005): 236-248; Colin Beinike, “Comics as Comics: Comics Studies, Disciplinarity, and the Comics Scholar,” *IJOCA* 15, no. 2 (2013): 485-494; Gregory Streirer, “The State of Comics Scholarship: Comics Studies and Disciplinarity,” *IJOCA* 13, no. 2 (2011): 263-285; Philip Troutman, “The Discourse of Comics Scholarship: A Rhetorical Analysis of Research Article Introductions,” *IJOCA* 12, no. 2 (2010): 432-445; Charles Hatfield, “Indiscipline, or, the Condition of Comics Studies,” *Transatlantica* 1 (2010): 2-15.

¹⁴ William Kuskin, “Continuity in Literary Form and History,” *English Language Notes* 46, no. 2 (2008): 6.

of the lowbrow but also the threat to individual thought and expression posed by mass culture in general. The popularity of the comic book certainly suggested some kind of mind-control, which the well-made poem and the well-tuned critic stood ready to resist.”¹⁵ For these cultural arbiters, mass media itself eroded the integrity of the individual genius, and therefore wilted the capacity of art to speak truth to the world. Comics thus formed a site of contention between ostensibly high and low art, and their attendant dynamics of cultural capital. In Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, “social subjects...distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.”¹⁶ Social distinctions rely on the categorization of art, largely absent any consideration of the narrative qualities of the art itself. The physical media upon which comics storytelling has been inscribed had as much to do with its marginalization as the content of its pages. Recalling the Introduction of this dissertation, what makes something like Robert Sikoryak’s “Inferno Joe” a *funny* comic is the fact that Dante’s *Commedia* is established as high art and the Bazooka Joe wrappers that inspire Sikoryak’s panels are established as low art. What makes it an *important* comic is the fact that its very existence calls that established hierarchy of value into question.

Comics dramatizes the “network of oppositions,” between high and low, old and new, refined and vulgar, behind which “lies the whole social order,” as Bourdieu would say.¹⁷ If the comics page is a surface upon which to inscribe the tension between tradition and the individual talent, it is also a site of encounter between the authority of the past and the shifting material

¹⁵ Jared Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 81.

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984, 2010), xxix.

¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 470.

conditions of the present. Comic books challenge the mechanism of Bourdieu's dynamics of taste: a textual space both "easy and common" and, paradoxically, marked by its "rarity as distinguished."¹⁸ These chameleonic cultural objects manifest ambivalence with respect to adjectival categories such as "'high,' 'low,' 'pop,' 'mass,' 'folk.'"¹⁹ Value adheres to cultural objects as they move through time in relation to their readers – art inhabits unstable fields of cultural capital, subject to influence from sources of power and authority. Comics is a popular art *and* a critically acclaimed one, marrying otherwise antagonistic modes of cultural production. The comics medium tells stories of people, ideas, and the mediations of technological objects that bring each together through time. Comic books and graphic novels live in the flow of vernacular time, challenging patterns of value and capital attribution by hybridizing the architecture of the page and the structure of the book in time through conscious acts of manipulation and technological mediation.

Continuities of Space in Richard McGuire's *Here*

RAW Vol. 2 No. 1, which contains Richard McGuire's comic short "Here," exemplifies my thesis about comics being a medium of convergence in time and contestation of value. Its format, the trade paperback book, shapes these relationships. While it contains the same irreverent, politically challenging, visually stunning, and formally avant-garde material made available through the large-form magazine issues of *RAW* in the 1980s, the book is literally scaled down, compressed, and bound for bookshelves. The change in format speaks to the

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 171.

¹⁹ Lawrence Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 30.

change in cultural status of comics, from popular and widely dispersed to critically attended and rarified, and it renders this volume appropriate as a starting point in exploring the process by which comics negotiate capital in the field of literary production. The fact that Vol. 2 No. 1 contains both Sikoryak's meditation on literary time "Inferno Joe" and McGuire's "Here" is compellingly coincidental: both comics expose the surface of the comics page as a multidimensional container, disrupting time's stability relative to space. These are comics about continuity and change across time, continuity that fully encompasses different layers of technological mediation, printed in a book itself representative of continuity and change across time. In this section I look to "Here" (1989) and its descendent the graphic novel *Here* (2014), expressed in both physical and digital formats, to show how comics use narrative space and physical space to manipulate the readerly experience of time and value. "Here" and *Here* allegorize the movement of comics through the cultural marketplace, providing an access point to the dynamics of cultural and financial capital that have shaped the recent history of the medium. McGuire's strange conceptual piece narrates the historical emergence of comics in the humanist imagination, and thus teaches humanists to read the relationship between time, space, and value not as moments of disruption in history but as networks of continuity.

The *here* of "Here" is a single point in space, represented for most of the story by the corner of a simple living room.²⁰ (Fig. 3.3) A plain image, sparse and geometric. The corner acts as the blank canvas upon which McGuire paints the history of the Earth itself. Many different things inhabit this particular point in space, often simultaneously in the panel and on the page. For example, in a two-panel spread, (Fig. 3.4) McGuire depicts on the left a mouse, in 1999,

²⁰ Richard McGuire, "Here," in *RAW* 2, no. 1, ed. Françoise Mouly and Art Spiegelman (New York: Penguin, 1989), 69.

excitedly approaching cheese laid as bait on a mousetrap.²¹ In the lower right corner, a child in 2028 plays with a toy stegosaurus, mimicking its guttural snarl. In the next panel, several temporal shifts have taken place. Several seconds have passed in 1999, depicting the unfortunate aftermath of the mouse's curiosity. McGuire's attention to spatial continuity is on display here – while the mouse constitutes the majority of the frame in the first panel, it is just a small portion of the second. But the spatial placement within both panels remains undisturbed. The major shift between the two panels is in the dinosaur – while the child plays with a toy stegosaurus in 2028, the second panel shifts back to show us the real ancestor traveling through this particular point in space in 100,650,010 B.C. with a man's face, laughing, dropped in from an entirely different timeline. McGuire establishes continuity between reality and its representation across a hundred million years, showcasing how space is a compressor of time. These two panels claim an endurance of space within time, and they make a strong claim for comics as the ideal representation of this phenomenon. The reader of “Here” is asked to be in multiple timelines at once, a reading practice that attends the energy discontinuity in time generates within continuity of physical space.

In “Here,” space has a history in time defined simultaneously by lineage and moment. What has been and what is endure together. What McGuire has done is pulled back the layers, exposing the architecture of time as we understand it in space, the unexpected threads of continuity between the past, the present, and the future. McGuire's brilliance rests in his ability to do this conceptual work without necessarily disrupting the native qualities and formal structure of comics. He calls conscious attention to the manipulative possibilities of comics time, asking readers to understand the past and the future in and through the focal lens of the present

²¹ McGuire, “Here,” 72.

movement between discrete parts. “Here” collapses historical time into a single narrative present while inviting readers across ages and epochs. McGuire’s formal functions challenge what Chute has called the “concomitant *pace* and *rhythm* the page gestures at establishing” through manipulations of “panel size, panel shape, panel placement” – “Here” presents readers with a subtle trick, lures us by retaining a structural regularity that betrays erratic and sweeping conceptual and temporal mechanics.²² McGuire’s panels organize a formal principle into a dramatic reading experience.

A good example of the subtle formalism of “Here” is a panel depicting an elderly woman in various states of cleaning house.²³ (Fig. 3.5) The panel spans a tight timeframe, relative to the rest of “Here”: 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996. Certainly a far cry from the one hundred million year spread between the dinosaur and its representation as toy. Across these four years, the woman wipes the window and mantle, scrubs and sweeps the floor. The panel is an exercise in repetition – a single continual line of dialogue runs across the various timeframes: “the more” “I clean...” “...the more” “...it gets dirty.” Spreading a single syntactic line across four distinct timeframes enforces a sense of continual repetition through time. The panel depicts what could logically be perceived as a single moment, the time it takes to deliver the line, but fragments that moment, splintering it into a representation of the mundane work of continually cleaning up, day in and day out over a span of years. The panel reads as a metaphor for life, extending linearly through time but compressed into the idiosyncratic formations of memory and habit. Comics is uniquely suited to this kind of compression, and the effect of “Here,” conveying the magisterial stillness that comes at the encounter with time before its subsequent movements backward and

²² Hillary Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 7.

²³ McGuire, “Here,” 73.

forward, is lost in other media more conventionally time-dependent.²⁴ The panels of “Here” draw readers into a site of convergence, holding time and its iterations in suspension, relying on the latent energy produced when conventional notions of temporal progress falter. McGuire demonstrates the capacity of comics to articulate time as a function of space.

“Here” announces its grandiosity in a small voice, unassuming, with no expository descriptions or guidelines for reading. It is a simple comic, as fellow cartoonist Chris Ware tells it: “birthdays, deaths, dinosaurs. In 36 panels, the universe.”²⁵ But part of what makes “Here” an important work is the elegance with which it aligns these differentials in scale and scope. Reflection grows from the encounter of time and space on the page. “Here” argues that the spaces we inhabit mindlessly, without conscious thought or attention, are rich with emotional and material histories. McGuire puts this claim to the test as he revises “Here” into *Here*. The typographical difference in the two titles is significant. “Here” is a short story published in a comix anthology. *Here* is a 300+ page full-color hardcover graphic novel published by powerhouse publisher Pantheon.²⁶ Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*, Charles Burns’ *Black Hole*, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* – it could be argued that Pantheon has substantially influenced the formation

²⁴ This loss is felt acutely in the 1991 short film “Here (1991),” by Timothy Masick and William Trainor, which clearly adores its subject but loses its essence in its frenetic wipes and frame transitions. Timothy Masick and William Trainor, “Here (1991),” YouTube video, 6:02, posted by Bill Trainor, May 22, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57hR44mB5u0>.

²⁵ The line comes from Chris Ware, “Chris Ware on Here by Richard McGuire – a game-changing graphic novel,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/dec/17/chris-ware-here-richard-mcguire-review-graphic-novel>. Ware is a great admirer of McGuire, and in another article he argues that McGuire, like Cezanne, Stravinsky, and Joyce, is an artist that “takes the accrued potential of his or her discipline and recasts it into a brand-new way of seeing or feeling.” Chris Ware, “Richard McGuire and ‘Here’: A Grateful Appreciation,” *Comic Art* no. 8, ed. Todd Hignite (Oakland: Buenaventura Press, 2006), 5.

²⁶ Richard McGuire, *Here* (New York: Pantheon, 2014).

of the contemporary comics canon.²⁷ The relation between *RAW* and Pantheon expresses the movement of comics up the ladder of culture. The underground comix movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which represented a real social world on pages tinged with depraved and idiosyncratic fantasy, laid the groundwork for the auteur avant-garde cartooning of the 1980s and 1990s. This trajectory, according to Chute, is “responsible for the current prospering field of literary comics.”²⁸ As the work of these artists, in many cases out of print or difficult to track down, was collected into newly published books, it shifted, was brought into alignment with the tastes and expectations of mainstream literary culture. And so, in the 25-year gap that separates “Here” from *Here*, comics has experienced acculturation, authorization, and formalization both in its narrative content and in the format in which it is distributed. Comics continues to facilitate encounters between the past and present in the act of reading: the work required to produce *Here* from “Here” highlights this enduring connection.

Here operates through the same formal principles of “Here,” but scaled up. If “Here” is John Coltrane soloing fast over the changes in “Giant Steps,” *Here* is the culmination of that tension in the open and expressive interplay of improvisers in *A Love Supreme*. Time and space are like the chords and the soloist, varying in sequence, but then sequences repeat and modulate, creating patterns of rhythm and sound that the improviser navigates over and through, exploring hidden corners in search of melodic relationships. Temporality during improvisation is hybrid, the solo itself a linear progression from start to finish in time but the musical foundation a looped and cyclical set of figures, locked in recursion. McGuire reproduces this feeling of tension in readers as *Here* tacitly implies that they should read the book from start to finish but fills its

²⁷ Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey argue that “the industrial impact” of Pantheon “on the book market should not be underestimated in the success of the graphic novel.” *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 17.

²⁸ Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 104.

pages with loops, fragments, and returns. During a sequence in the first third of the book, a figure resembling Ben Franklin rides a carriage toward his son William's house, engaged in conversation with his grandson. (Fig. 3.6) Remarking that he was his grandson's age when he first passed through this town, the Franklin figure delivers a line so perfectly suited to the book it seems unfairly obvious: "life has a flair for rhyming events."²⁹ The sentence serves as the type of expository statement McGuire conspicuously deprives us of in "Here." Events that rhyme are related to one another by both sameness and change. Rhyme is a relation of structure, of sound, but one that allows for variation in meaning, especially as that variation occurs across time. *Here* is a comic that rhymes often, inflecting its singular spatial perspective with multitudes of contextual variances. It overwhelms readers with its concept without ever losing the intimacy that connects them to its pages. The book manifests the twin lyricism of life and text, the recurrence of motifs absent narrative but never devoid of substance.

Here, working with much more space than "Here," can experiment more easily with different temporal and narrative encounters, creating constellations of relations on a single page. The condensation of life and text in *Here* also extends to continuity in the processes of generation. Another page in *Here* depicts five mothers, holding their infant children, across five moments in time: 1957, 1949, 1924, 1988, and 1945 (from left to right). (Fig. 3.7) On this page, the multiple mothers suggest sequential repetition across time. But seeing them cradle their infants, intimately tied to their lineage, suggests a unique generation that militates against the closed circuit of repetition. Generation and repetition remain tense in their confrontation on the page. The Franklin figure's sense of rhyme returns – *Here* narrates a story of continual sameness in change, a metaphor for the extension of family into lineage. McGuire exploits the medium's

²⁹ McGuire, *Here*.

unique capacity to visually represent this tension, using panels as windows, or better wormholes, into different moments in time. He embeds time within time, stacking and layering panels. The overlap of life between these mothers and their children narrates this relationship. Overlap, fragmentation layered into the illusion of wholeness, recurs across *Here*. The comic uses the space of the page to articulate the encounters in time we engage in each act of reading, implicating life as much as art. This is the kind of temporality that *Here* does best, infusing the steady rhythm of our reading with the sweeping breadth of life and history. This is precisely why *Here* is such a compelling exercise in continuity. It consistently asks readers to balance multiple pathways and timeframes at once, including narrative movements in time but also the material reality of *Here*'s production as an expanded graphic novel. It is a book that taxes the memory and the attention of its readers. *Here* condenses the entire history of the comics medium in its pages, not to mention three billion years of Earth's geological history.

Here synthesizes the conceptual depth of the formal experiment of "Here" with the weight of literary authority in the form of the book. What happens when that weight is dissipated, and readers encounter *Here* as an interactive digital surface? Available through Apple's iBooks platform, the ebook *Here* dramatically enhances reader engagement and interactivity.³⁰ While readers can swipe through pages to move through *Here* like any other ebook, there are many more ways to experience the story. Tapping panels on the digital page in some cases triggers a movement in sequence, tracing individual time frames across a single page surface (an operation spread across multiple pages in the print iteration). Like the print book, each page and panel are tagged with a date in the upper left corner. In the ebook, tapping the date transports readers to other points in time, which sometimes correspond to other pages in the print

³⁰ Richard McGuire, *Here* (New York: Pantheon, 2014). Apple iBook edition.

version but sometimes are amalgamations of various pages. The movement is random, and different each time the reader initiates it. There is no set sequence; instead, the ebook allows unique and customizable experiences for each reader. Beyond manipulating the reader's experience in time, the ebook gives the static pictures of *Here* themselves existence in time. Figures within certain panels, such as a cat who moves across the page in 1999, are gently animated, taking otherwise inert moments and thrusting them into temporal experience. The reading experience of the digital *Here* is spontaneous, heterogeneous, and powerfully intimate. This comic takes a cold medium, the tablet screen – a surface accused of severing intimate bonds of presence through layers of mediation – and infuses it with the warmth of personal experience.

This inversion, the intimacy of being drawn into the interface of the screen as opposed to the tactile experience of the book, marks an important departure of comics from the traditionally defined logic of the book. Books harness the interactive potential of format, paratext, and editorial apparatus to involve the reader in a synthetic meaning-making process grounded in relationships of technological mediation. The ebook version of McGuire's *Here* takes this one step further. While the book is materially made in advance of any acts of reading on a large scale, the digital code making up *Here* is necessarily contingent, latent – the narrative does not exist independently of its relationship to the reader. In effect, the reader writes the story as he or she interacts with the interface of the book. Its electronic iteration is thus the natural evolution of the formal experiment of "Here" and *Here* and an intervention into the DNA of the book. The point in space, the *here*, is subject to infinitely variable experiences in time triggered by the unpredictable actions of each discrete reader. McGuire's interactive ebook actualizes the latent energy produced in the encounter of space and time on the printed page. Its power lies in its capacity to deploy spatial continuity to contain temporal instability.

Trying to understand *Here* by any of its iterations in isolation collapses the rich ancestry and future potential of comics as a mode of engagement with literary time. While the book *Here* might be the most emblematic of the story's versions – short, long, and digital – this is more a function of the cultural cache of the term “graphic novel” than it is a marker of the any sort of ideal form of the work. The term has come to be a symbol of legitimation, of “gentrification,” even mutating the ontology of comics themselves into something that is “becoming literature.”³¹ Art Spiegelman has said that “graphic novel” exists “as one of the euphemisms that people have used to say that comics are not a guilty pleasure,” which is another way of saying that the term has been deployed to confer legitimacy.³² The labels we use to describe comics art, even when they merely denote distinctions in physical format or distribution classification, influence the ways in which these objects accrue value and capital in the field of cultural production. *Here* carries more weight, physically and culturally, as a hardcover book than “Here” does as a short comic story, despite the fact that they do the same conceptual work. And the digital *Here* conforms neither to the conventions of comics as a mass-produced commodity nor as a rarified art object. Branding *Here* a graphic novel is, in a way, a distortion of history, “an attempt,” as Vanessa Russel argues, “to distance comic book history and relaunch the text in the ‘higher’ category of literature.”³³ And if assigning the term “graphic novel” to a work produced in comics

³¹ Beaty argues that “graphic novel” is merely a “gentrifying replacement for ‘comics.’” Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, 34. Likewise Katalin Orbán claims “the graphic novel in particular has emerged as a product of the gentrification of comics into a canonizable literary form over the last twenty years.” Orbán, “A Language of Scratches and Stiches,” 170. Thierry Groensteen gives quite a bit of functional power to the term, claiming that “for the last quarter century, comics have been undergoing a ‘becoming literature,’ with what is now termed the *graphic novel*.” Thierry Groensteen, *Comics and Narration*, trans. Ann Miller (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), 175.

³² Art Spiegelman and W.J.T. Miller, “What the %\$#! Happened to Comics?” *Critical Inquiry* 40.3 (2014): 24.

³³ Vanessa Russel, “The Mild-Mannered Reporter,” 222.

form can be deconstructed as a means of capitalization (in the guise of legitimacy to the eyes of dominant culture), *Here* emblemizes the process.

The path from “Here” to *Here* highlights the ways the idea of the “graphic novel” becomes ideological. From “Here” to *Here* is a story of growth, both literal and symbolic. *Here* renovates “Here,” enlarging it in mass, increasing its property taxes. “Here” moves from a cramped space wedged between other short comics stories in an anthology into its own place on the bookshelf. The interactive ebook *Here* shifts the experience of reading from the logic of the codex to the logic of the screen. These transmutations expose comics as a chameleonic form, negotiating different representational strategies and manipulating its readers’ experiences in time. *Here* communicates in a vernacular that bridges high/low divides even as it remains within the purview of a particular constellation of avant-garde artistic production. As much as the bookish *accouterment* of *Here* (dust jacket, title page with author, publisher, and date information, library of congress classification data) authorize the book from the perspective of dominant culture, the story’s iterations in avant-garde anthologies and in the still-uncertain world of electronic publishing reveals its insistent and exploratory vernacularity. These shifts remind us that publication format can substantially shape, if not actively manipulate, a reader’s encounter with art. The format of the work, the entryway through which readers encounter it in time, brokers a relationship that embeds and exposes the popular history of the form through the materials of its contemporary legitimization. But it allows for neither past nor present to dominate, relishing in their tension instead.

The transcendent arbitrariness that defines the various physical and digital iterations of *Here* in time conditions the reader’s experience of the narrative on the material environments analyzed above. The more a reader hunts for patterns across these narrative fragments the more

she encounters nothing. *Here* confronts readers with the mundane reality of life in time. Some things change, some things do not. The book constructs a complex mechanism of scale, reorienting the way we experience time such that a single point in space can at once contain an entire dimension. In *Here* fragments cohere, loops form, and vignettes recur. But these are usually dissipated quickly, separated in the space of the book, stretching our attention across its pages and gestures, swallowed by their context in the continual movements of years across a point in space. There is a beauty in the constancy of *Here*. There is meaning in that endurance, and McGuire harnesses the capacity for the comics page to represent it. *Here* needs comics to tell its story, it needs the glaring vulgarity of a form completely disrespectful of the relationship between space and time established in the Western metaphysical tradition. Comics mutates time.

Here, in all of its iterations, calls attention to the intersections of reader, narrative, and value in comics. McGuire's iterative work suggests not only the capacity for comics to play with our experience of time on the page but also in the real world of artistic production and distribution. Scholars of the book often neglect the movement of art objects through time, and the distortions, alterations, and aberrations that attend them. We interpret the object in front of us without being entirely cognizant of its legacy within much larger material networks of production. Nowhere is this more evident than in the world of comics, historically subject to reprinting, repackaging, and repurposing. Gardner, thinking of graphic novels specifically, writes that comics are rarely "published in one single format but instead have an editorial trajectory that engenders shifting relationships between the unit (the image or the panel) and the whole (strip/page/book)."³⁴ The stories contained by the pages of comic books and graphic novels are not final, but instead subject to continuities and discontinuities as they travel through time and

³⁴ Gardner, *Projections*, 106.

pass through the hands of readers and critics. McGuire's continual reengagement with his story, expressing it in new formats and different media, exposes "Here" as the site of convergence of time and contestation of value I have argued is the defining quality of comics. To explore how comic books and graphic novels manipulate our experience of time by repeatedly subjecting us to memory and desire, to fragmentation and cohesion, and to the tension between the unit and the whole, I turn now to Chris Ware's *Building Stories*.

The Book as Container: Chris Ware's *Building Stories*

Richard McGuire's "Here" sent shockwaves through the comics community, but its influence registers nowhere more acutely than in the work of Chris Ware. Ware's investment in shaping his comics to the contours of memory retains McGuire's architectural disposition and his penchant for formal innovation. As well, like McGuire, Ware constructed the standalone graphic novel publication *Building Stories* out of fragments and false starts anthologized in his *ACME Novelty Library* serial, other comics anthologies and magazines, even a now-defunct digital comic called "Touch Sensitive" hosted through a McSweeney's iPad app. McGuire and Ware literalize the narrative capacity of comics to synthesize pieces into wholes on the page and through the screen. Instead of playing with the readerly experience of panels and gutters alone, these creators conceive of the entire enterprise of comic books and graphic novels as a tension of fragments floating in time, pulled together in *ad hoc* and continually shifting configurations. The manipulation that McGuire and Ware perpetrate on the comics reading experience elides the space between narratives and the surfaces upon which they are printed and distributed. This playfulness with respect to materials exposes the conditions of value to which comics are

subject. The work of Chris Ware challenges the divisions we draw between high and low cultural value. He embraces the aesthetic and formal conventions of classic newspaper comic strips (a “low” form) in publications lauded by the literary and artistic establishment – all the while infusing both forms with the feeling of nostalgia and progress. Such paradoxes render Ware’s cartooning a fruitful site for interrogation of convergence and contestation in comics.

In this section, I build on my analysis of *Here* by turning to one of its conceptual and methodological descendants, *Building Stories*. *Building Stories*, published in 2012, is a stunning work of graphic storytelling. Falling somewhere between a box of paper scraps and a series of bound books, Ware’s work tells the story of a woman’s life, her youthful ambitions, her love affairs, her coming to terms with parenthood and mortality, and her professional and creative tensions. A life, a normal life, lived in time. But it also tells the story of the physical spaces that life inhabits, buildings, at once static and stable on the page but no less subject to the decay and degradation wrought by time, both physical and emotional. Its title is a pun – the work is about the act of building stories as much as it is a collection of stories about buildings. *Building Stories* exposes comics as a medium capable of temporal paradox, holding time captive, suspended in the structure of space. In Ware’s hands, comics assumes the architectural operations of memory. Ware exploits memory to use comics as a conduit for *both* the perceived solidity of the past and the fragmented dispersal of the present. I contend that these paradoxes position comics not on a spectrum of legitimization from the perspective of either high or low culture but as a synthetic vernacular bridging the two in time through technological mediation and digital reading.

Chris Ware is a cartoonist obsessed with the past. This emerges in his predilection for embedding the styles of the old newspaper comic-strip creators into his work, in his editorial endeavors, in the consistent themes of nostalgia, historical representation, and memory that trail

his characters. His breakout success *Jimmy Corrigan* is an insistently backward-looking work, unable to shake the legacy of family, loss, remembrance, and national history. This nostalgia is, of course, at odds with the perception of Ware as a forward-thinking design innovator, a cartoonist at the forefront of formal experimentation, publication, and distribution. For Ware, comics is “a way of experimenting with new modes of telling stories about time that allow for the past and present, the monumental and the ephemeral, to speak to each other across seemingly irrevocable divides.”³⁵ Ware projects his analog convictions, to the point of luddite-ism, and yet his works operate in an entirely digital mode of reading.³⁶ According to Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey, in *Building Stories*, “Ware appears to have used the Internet as a metaphor; its loops and crossovers literally are repackaged into the multiple publications (akin to separate Web pages or series of pages) that are in the box and are left free for readers to work through in a sequence of their own selection.”³⁷ But Ware’s engagement with the digital pushes beyond metaphor. His work encourages us to render the lineage of the past sensible within the hallmark of digital computing: combinations and recombinations of discrete units. Ware’s comics are driven by a tension between coherence, fragmentation, and mediation. Panels, words, pages, and connections form uniquely iterated formations for each reader and upon each reading and in each new environment of reading.

³⁵ Gardner, *Projections*, 165.

³⁶ I use “analog” and “digital” here following the descriptions provided by Jake Buckley in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*: “In basic terms, the analog concerns all that is continuous, fluctuating, and qualitatively variable within communication, whereas the digital concerns all that is discontinuous, boundary-making, and quantitatively controlling within communication.” Jake Buckley, “Analog versus Digital,” in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Digital Media*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan, Lori Emerson, and Benjamin Robertson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 7.

³⁷ Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel*, 219.

Reading Ware is, in many ways, a procedural experience, but one resonant with history. His page compositions are famously architectural and rooted in a meticulous awareness of the design experience. Transitions from panel to panel and element to element are often directive (sometimes explicitly with arrows and lines, sometimes implied by layout choices), and recurring structural clusters and shapes lend the reading experience an algorithmic register. But Ware's rare talent is his capacity to render the vulnerability and fragility of human memory within this digital mode. His work captures what Chute has called "the structure of remembering."³⁸ The cyclical loops and recurrent elements of *Building Stories* engage us in acts of remembering. But the work also remembers the history of its medium on the level of its format. *Building Stories* is a tactile history of comics, retracing the medium through its fragments on broadsheets, newspapers, comic strips, comic book floppies, magazines, children's books, Franco-Belgian style albums, all the way to hardbound graphic novels.³⁹ (Fig. 3.8) *Building Stories* asks our hands to remember these forms as we encounter its pieces – it weaves the past into the present narrative, and in so doing it calls to the future of the form. To pull this off, Ware has to delicately balance our engagement with the present narrative and our attention to its formal properties and its format. We have to care about the story and care about the way it is told. This balance allows Ware to immerse us not only in the story of his female protagonist but also in her place in the lineage of comics as a mode of storytelling and a mode of cultural production.

Building Stories is hyper conscious of itself as a printed object occupying physical space. It willfully entrenches itself in the metrics of weight, substance, and endurance. It knows it cannot fit on your bookshelf. The work wears its print nativism proudly: cardstock, paper, cloth, staples, thread, ink, all in shifting configurations. *Building Stories* finds its ancestry in the

³⁸ Chute, *Graphic Women*, 113.

³⁹ Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (New York: Pantheon, 2012).

miscellany, a book composed of fragments of verse or other writings bound only by the shared space between the front and back covers. But instead of telling many different stories in a single format it trains its reader's attention on a single story spread across many different formats. This shifts the locus of reading from narrative to format. And yet, in subjecting the reader to so many different formats, Ware is able to exploit the affordances of each to direct the eye through the story. *Building Stories* thus approaches the comics mode from both historical angles: the memory of smeared ink on child-sized fingers and the modular fragmentation and constellation of the digital age. For Ware, the structure of remembering means entering and exiting the story in multiple places, refracted through distinct physical objects and timeframes. *Building Stories* at once evokes and renovates the traditions of telling stories in bound physical objects.

Even as it insists on analog physicality, *Building Stories* is a digital book. On the level of format, the work is assembled by the reader in a series of combinations of discrete physical materials. Importantly, these combinations are self-guided and self-sustaining. Ware provides little to no roadmap. This has the compelling effect of severing readers from the wishes of the author, as well as reducing the impulse to read in a single movement from beginning to end. Just as *Building Stories* spreads itself across the space of your desk, your floor, your room, your screen, it spreads itself across time, inviting you back into its ever-changing potential. Ware did work to follow up on the physical digitality of *Building Stories* by collaborating with a programmer to develop an interactive iPad app based on sequences culled from it, called "Touch Sensitive." Since the app versions have not been kept up to date with new builds of Apple's mobile operating system iOS, the app is no longer available. The only access I have to it is a short video produced by Ware's programmer to demonstrate how touches and gestures work in the app. There is a powerful irony here, an inversion of the operation of McGuire's *Here* as it

moved from physical to digital formats. For *Building Stories*, the insistently material form of the “graphic novel” provides an experience more indebted to the procedures of digital reading than its own electronic counterpart. Ware exploits a productive tension between the present history of the work’s various forms and the innovation of the reading procedure it requires of its readers. *Building Stories* stands as a fulcrum – behind is the history of Ware’s medium of storytelling, with all of its ties to the mass market of newspaper printing, pulp magazines, and children’s books. This is a history marked as vulgar, a past Ware has worked hard to reclaim as a site of artistic and cultural potential, a beautiful forgotten world. Ware draws the vulgar history of comics and cartooning into the prestige markets of the avant-garde book.⁴⁰ Ahead of Ware is the digital frontier, not simply defined by the creation of digital apps but an exploration of new editions and iterations accessible to a broad audience the way newspapers once were – a new vernacular mode of cultural distribution and consumption. *Building Stories* demonstrates the danger in essentializing certain patterns of engagement based on the modality of encounters with art objects. The “book” exemplifies the patterns of vernacular art leveraging both nostalgia and memory of past authority in acts of innovative technological mediation.

Ware’s work asks readers to hold together the nostalgia for the past and the anticipation of the future in the present moment of reading, a strategy falling well in line with the history of vernacular literary culture. It does this both actively through the story its pages tell, and passively through the function of the structures that bind them. This process begins with the box itself, no less a diegetic element than the pages it contains. Functionally, the box contains *Building Stories*,

⁴⁰ For example, see his editorial work on the *Drawn & Quarterly* collections of Frank King’s classic newspaper comic strip *Gasoline Alley* beginning in 2005. These multi-hundred page volumes, introduced by critical and editorial commentary as well as archival photographs and draft work posit King as an auteur creator in the lineage of comics storytelling. It lends endurance, by virtue of the high-quality materials and large-size format of the book, to cartooning that has literally almost disappeared into the erosions of time.

but it also narratively schematizes the fragments it holds. (Fig. 3.9) The back of the box declares its purpose: “Everything you need to read the new graphic novel *Building Stories*” – a declaration that can only read as ironic considering how divergent this work is from what we would otherwise encounter as a “graphic novel.”⁴¹ But Ware recognizes this irony, knowing that *Building Stories*’ “14 distinctively discrete Books, Booklets, Magazines, Newspapers, and Pamphlets” do not fit into that limiting frame, physically or conceptually.⁴² The rest of the back of the box presents icons representing each individual component of its contents, linked by dotted lines to the places they inhabit spread throughout a reader’s home. On this surface the pages are too small to read, remaining only fragments. Our focus is pulled toward the movement of the lines. Ware uses the components of his own story, and his anticipation of our relationship to them, to emblemize the work’s insistence that fragments remain in tension with the whole, the condition of our lives at every moment. As the unnamed female protagonist says in a small set of panels printed on the outer edge of the lower portion of the box, “We have absolutely no idea of just how complicated everything is, y’know?”⁴³ Applied to Ware’s work, this remains a profound understatement.

Building Stories mirrors its spatial dispersal on the level of its narrative. In the work, fragments of bodies, memory, recollection, present action, and future desire *should* cohere into the narration of a single life – the hallmark of graphic narrative as Chute defined it in “Comics as Literature?” – but they never really do. Instead, the effect of moving across so many different fragments trains us to approach life as a series of discrete moments, with past and future returning to the present, in new and different ways, upon each encounter. A sequence from the

⁴¹ Ware, *Building Stories*, back of box.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, side of lower portion of box.

green hardcover album fragment exemplifies this. The female protagonist, newly single again, returns to her childhood home. This simple act, a ritual part of life for so many young adults, emblemizes one of *Building Stories*' primary mechanisms: the experience of pain and of loss woven together with their location in time and space. The three-story building within which so much of the work's action takes place is one such place; the female protagonist's childhood bedroom in her parents' house is another. On the bottom right quadrant of a page from the album, Ware condenses multiple timelines into a set of stable spatial encounters. (Fig. 3.10)

Large blue lettering and definitive punctuation locate us in the "NOW." And the corresponding panel frames the bedroom as it stands – a small home office set up with childhood toys and memorabilia hanging above a turned-out sofa bed. The protagonist's narration lays out the scene: "whenever I go home, I sleep on a sofabed, since my mom turned my old room into an office a few years ago..."⁴⁴ This panel exemplifies the work's complex handling of time. Visually the scene is static, the depiction of a moment in time. This is conventional in comics, where historically a panel frames a particular temporal slice. The comics become animated, in a sense, as readers move panel-to-panel. Ware takes advantage of this expectation to represent a much more complex relationship to memory. The image is actually a narrative of change, of the shifting uses to which we subject space across the moments and days and years. The room is both a container for the memories of what was and for the realities of what is.

Across the framed border of panels, the page itself acts as a multi-temporal container. In a smaller panel just below the one considered above, Ware replicates the point of view. The protagonist's narration links the two panels on the page: "I don't mind though...[panel break]"

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, yellow/green album, no pagination.

because it helps me keep all the pieces in place.”⁴⁵ The pieces in this case are the different iterations of herself across time, a little one-legged girl slumped on the floor, a teenager resigned to the floor with a pillow and blanket, a young woman sleeping with the man whom she loves, and herself in present day, sleeping alone on the sofa bed. Just as the first panel depicts a room containing its own history, collapsed, this one compresses the pieces of the protagonist’s life into a single point in space. Format and narrative recognize and acknowledge each other in such moments. The levels of containment Ware builds, the exploration of time in its capacity for compression and expansion, extend from individual panels all the way up the work to the cardboard box containing the whole work. *Building Stories* suspends time in space, charging these pages and panels with the energy of pain, hope, love, and loss. The small moments in which we live out our lives draw within them metaphysics on a grand scale. In Ware’s hands, comics fearlessly invite past and present together into the space of the page. The pieces weave together but retain their unique and indivisible shape, a result of the embeddedness in technological mediation through which Ware renders his stories about time.

In *Building Stories*, the separation of pieces and wholes emerges as a guiding principle of both people and things. In the bedroom panels discussed above, pieces of the protagonist are contained by the page, and she uses her displacement from floor to bed to sofa to organize these iterations in time. One person split across time and held together through the coherence of space. The protagonist stands in for *Building Stories* itself – or, perhaps more appropriately the whole work is itself her life lived in time. On another of the work’s many pieces, this metonymical slippage gets interrogated further. The back page of a magazine sized folio, the one-page comic “Browsing” reveals the work’s thematic and conceptual self-awareness. (Fig. 3.11) The page

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

mixes narrative levels, depicting the protagonist's dream, her narration of it, and her present conversation with her daughter about the dream. In the dream, she encounters a book in a chain bookstore she recognizes immediately as being her own. A book she had never written but that contained everything she had ever started to write, think about, or forget. Across the first tier of panels, the book appears to be a traditional codex, uniform pages bound between two hard covers. But across the second tier the book shifts, becomes a box with contents spilling out onto the floor - "and it wasn't -- I dunno -- it wasn't really a **book**, either...it was in...**pieces**, like books falling apart out of a carton, maybe..."⁴⁶ The book she is describing, of course, sounds a lot like *Building Stories*. The book that contains and represents her life mirrors her existence in time, a series of pieces in need of keeping straight. Even her language mirrors a tension of fragmentation and cohesion. Punctuated by staccato ellipses, periodic bolded emphasis, and disrupted syntax, these words read as one more layer of brokenness. The protagonist's attempts to make sense of fragments extend even to her ability to process language and cognition. Across a sequence of six panels, the page narrates the shift from a conventional metaphor of a life contained in a book to one much less stable, ready to explode and spill out beyond its boundaries.

In "Browsing" *Building Stories* generates its own *raison d'être* – in telling the story of the protagonist's life as a series of modular fragments it builds the illusion of a whole, manifested by the box. But just as the pieces of her existence in time need order, so do the pieces of the book, so ready to spring and scatter across space as they are. But *Building Stories* is not a work of reckless abandon. As if in tension with the urging of its contents, "Browsing" displays one of Ware's most regular, conventional layouts – a neat three by four panel grid with a clear

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, "Disconnect"/"Browsing" folio.

header at the top and even gutters between panels. Recognizing the energy pushing against its limits, the page reverts to something stable and orderly, trying to repair its own broken contents. Pages like “Browsing” transcend their own narrative, climbing upwards to expand the parameters of the comics form itself. On the page, comics battles with time, asking readers to acknowledge its instability but unwilling to forsake the control it has historically wielded. It is a clever irony that the regularized page depicts the relationship between dream state and waking, when Ware’s virtuosic page designs across the rest of the work depict the mundane and quotidian. “Browsing” stabilizes time in the regularity of its space, a desperate attempt to keep readers grounded during a transcendent moment of realization that cuts deep into the protagonist’s sense of pain and regret. At a moment charged with the potential to break free into abstraction, *Building Stories* works hardest to keep us on the material page. In this way, *Building Stories* exemplifies the logic of the vernacular: drawing together the transcendent continuity of ideas and memory in time with the changing material conditions and networks that actualize it.

The pieces of the book, like the pieces of her life, are clearly demarcated in space, chunked, carefully composed page by page. Ware’s pages are the surfaces upon which time shifts and twists at the pace of recollection. “Browsing” is a metaphor for the reader’s encounter with *Building Stories*: faced with the reality of undirected fragmentation, all we can do is browse. The page is disorienting to read, despite its regularity. Across panels evenly shaped, sized, and spaced (a marker in comics of steady movement forward in time), the protagonist’s outfit and hair change erratically, her prosthetic leg is there in one panel and gone the next. The page reveals layer upon layer when inspected closely and yet remains reticent to expose itself immediately. But, for the protagonist, “it was...**beautiful**...it made **sense**.”⁴⁷ Of course, dreams

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

often feel as if they make sense despite their lack of logical cohesion. We might attribute this erratic jumping to the page relying on the compression of time that is the hallmark of dream – but I think Ware keeps us too sure-footed in the physical for that. “Browsing” invites its readers to experience themselves in time differently, based on fragments and discrete combinations not flights into different modes of consciousness. In this way, I would argue that fragmentation itself attains a kind of coherence when it is mapped in space and not just in time. This cuts to the heart of comics as a medium, and reveals *Building Stories* to be a work invested in exposing comics as a bridge between past and present, fostering a synthetic cooperation between the formal history of the medium and its contemporary emotional explorations.

In the final panel of “Browsing,” the female protagonist crouches on the floor above the book of her self (or selves). She thinks: “-- I just never thought I had it **in** me, that’s all, you know? -snf- ... I never thought I actually had it **in** me...”⁴⁸ These words synthesize her surprise and awe, her unexpected pride, along with her nagging senses of doubt, loss, and nostalgia. She never thought she had such largeness, such multitude, within her. And yet, fruition is on the page, locked in a dream. The confidence lent her by the dream dissipates in its material absence. And yet, when we hold the varied and various pieces of *Building Stories*, we are building a material iteration of that fictional life in the movements of our hands. The push and pull of Ware’s cartooning, diving deep into the design of life and yet springing upward to self-awareness, reflects the digital movement through the narrative his readers experience. This panel invites readers into a world of objects, people, and texts engaged in a relationship in time, reliant on each other to produce meaning in physical space. In this panel Ware draws us into the heart of creation, the magic of generation that sparks art and the cultures it reflects and builds. But we

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

look upon it darkly, through the prism of dream. Grandiosity limited by years of anxiety, pressure, and doubt. And I think here, in this panel, Ware is not just talking about the latent potential of his female protagonist. He is talking about comics itself.

In *Building Stories*, lineage is both material and metaphorical. The components of the box represent a material history of comics, as I have said, and the extension of the female protagonist's life across time and pages unfolds as a lineage before the eyes of readers. Familial legacy is a theme Ware explores often. On another of the large magazine folios, the protagonist sees herself in a series of mirrors, first as a child imagining who or what her adult self would resemble, then as young woman posing for herself as the subject of a self-portrait, then as a lover engaged in mutual masturbation with her boyfriend, then as an adult in middle age frankly searching herself for "the combined features" of her mother and father and finding them only imperfectly, and finally, as a mother seeing herself reflected in the face of her daughter, a young girl with the exuberance and confidence her mother seeks through her entire life ("Okay you can open your eyes now! Look, Momma! I am the most beautifulest girl in the world!").⁴⁹ (Fig. 3.12) The page is full of reflection, misdirection, interruption, and disappointment. Each sequence in time is arranged in circular fashion around the large, plaintive face of the protagonist, suggesting their links across the pathways of her memory. The page structure reinforces the fact that memory is a process of circular and not purely linear recollection. The sequences appear arranged almost as individual panels might be on a more conventional comics page, rendering the reading experience circular and looped across segments of time. The page begins and ends with the twin introspections of childhood, rendered through the external realities of maturity, further solidifying Ware's conviction that the comics page is a surface of both temporal and

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, magazine folio.

personal convergence. Pages like this abound in *Building Stories*, centralizing our focus on a large object (usually a face or a body) and then fracturing it as that object is reflected across time and experience. This is a page of combinations, familial, emotional, temporal. The convergence and contestation of comics art emerges as a mechanism of lineage.

Lineage, is, ultimately, an expression of time in space, in which both vectors remain malleable, compositional. Analog phenomena expressed in digital mode. The gradations of time are chunked. Ware pays conscious attention to the cultivation of nostalgia and loss in *Building Stories*, but he does so by evoking the rose-tinted acts of remembering triggered by reading cartoon strips across familiar material formats. Ware's innovation, then, is in using the collection of these formats into the single object *Building Stories* to embed vernacular history within the contemporary avant-garde. Ware, in effect, builds the cultural capital of his medium by recycling and repurposing the conditions that inhibited its critical and cultural acceptance in the first place. *Building Stories* sits at the point of convergence between old and new, between low art and high art, between the expressive vernacularity that has always been the claim of comics and the provocative experimentation of high art. Ware's synthesis of low and high, on the one hand, results in a tense bourgeois middle space, accepted as legitimate by the gatekeepers of culture. But on the other hand, *Building Stories* calls into question the conditions upon which determinations of value, low, high, or otherwise, might be formed. The very act of handling the work implicates readers in the shifting vectors of cultural capital. More than this, I argue that comics sit at a balance point between the temporal pace of the analog and the combinatorial efficacy of the digital. In Ware's hands, "comics chronicle the twilight world," somewhere between "data mining" and "dumpster diving," to borrow Jared Gardner's phrasing.⁵⁰ As pieces

⁵⁰ Gardner, *Projections*, 176, 150.

converge and fracture across the pages of *Building Stories*, comics emerges as a medium invested in exploring the lineage of lives and of texts, encountering each other through layers of technological mediation in time.

Ware's representation of time on the static surface of the page asks readers to reimagine their movements through memory. Like *Here*, *Building Stories* compresses timelines into moments, singular in their intensity and latent in their potential. Ware and McGuire perform their formal experiments with time across many decades and different publication formats, earning critical accolades and cultural acceptance along the way. They are auteur creators celebrated both inside and outside the industry, and, increasingly, by the academy. And while their works are extraordinary, they serve primarily to highlight the capacities of the medium that lurk in the wider distribution of comics art. In its ascent up the ladder of cultural capital, comics has capitalized on the celebrity of certain individuals – Robert Crumb, Art Spiegelman, Alison Bechdel, Chris Ware. But, as each of these creators would likely admit, American comics finds its best expression when it admits its commitments to nostalgia and memory, to the vernacular forms of yearned-for childhood. The relative positioning of comics in the field of cultural production never fully escapes this historical debt, a fact that renders the form ideal for investigating contemporary dynamics of legitimation and value. The comics form exposes the intersections of cultural capital and time as readers and critics encounter vernacular art, both in the marketplace and in the academy, applies equally to books without the artistic pretense and conceptual apparatus of *Here* or *Building Stories*. The serial formats of comics have been literalizing *Building Stories*' metaphors of fragmentation and cohesion in lives and stories since the earliest years of the twentieth century. To explore how convergence and contestation occur

month to month, year to year, I turn to *Saga*, an ongoing contemporary series published by Image Comics, written by Brian K. Vaughan and drawn by Fiona Staples.

“Am I shitting?”: *Saga*’s Transcendent Vulgarly

Saga tells an intimate family story across the grandiosity of the cosmos. In the section that follows, I argue that *Saga* experiments with traditional forms of continuity by conflating genetic lineage with generic convention. *Saga* argues that life and art move through time in tandem, positioning comics as a facilitator for the encounter between the two. *Saga* is a story about continuity as a form of birth. Continuity expresses a relationship between objects, ideas, and time. It is at the heart of comics in two ways: first, as characters span narrative arcs and generations of readers, strands of continuity hold fast divergent fragments, ultimately coalescing in canonical formations. Second, continuity and discontinuity in the material conditions of publication determine critical and commercial reception – across formats, comics shows how cultural capital accrues in objects. *Saga* exists as a series of comic book pamphlets, a smaller series of collected trade paperbacks (both physical and digital), and a standalone hardcover graphic novel containing the first 18 issues of the series. *Saga* narrates a story of family lineage in both diegetic and material registers. *Saga* is a story about the book, and how comics art navigates the changing conditions of publication and mediation to infiltrate increasingly broad cultural domains. Comics channels the desire for the past and its capacity to influence the present. At its core, *Saga* teaches us to find continuity in the crisis of birth, the ultimate moment of mediation, to find in that moment the concurrent articulation of the legacy of the past and the potential of the future. Birth is messy and painful, a mixture of the sublimity of life emerging in

the world and the visceral bodily functions necessary to allow it. Birth is transcendently vulgar, and *Saga* harnesses that primal paradox to expose how comics interrogates the conditions of determination and discrimination that have separated the transcendent from the material in the world of literature and art.

Saga's issues often open with splash pages, full-page images absent structural definition. While this strategy effectively shocks the reader into immersion in the story, it also speaks to the metaphor of birth that defines the narrative and the cultural impact of the series. Opening with a splash page disorients the reader in time, inviting them into a single moment rather than an extension of story in time. The first page of *Saga* Vol. 1 No. 1 (Fig. 3.13) depicts a birth, but it frames our experience of that birth in very particular ways.⁵¹ The page opens with a brief narrative intervention: "this is how an idea becomes real." This line orients readers to a series of thresholds, between abstraction and materiality, between becoming and being, between gestation and birth. The words scrawl across the page, absent the familiar marker of the speech balloon, curled tightly along the outline of the figure's head. Its lettering is scratchy, deviating from the traditional format of the caption box by conforming to the contours of the page itself. There is a primitive quality to the line, something alien from and yet intimately connected to its environment. This form of narration is a recurring motif in *Saga* – the words of Hazel, the product of the illicit union of series protagonists Alana and Marko, comes to readers from an indistinct point in the future, superimposed onto the series' pages in subtle condensations of time. This imposition hints at the story about to unfold across time, expanding forward from the compressed moment of the first page. "This is how an idea becomes real" – the phrase works doubly. On the page, the words slant downward, drawing our eye across the outline of the figure

⁵¹ Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples, "Chapter One," *Saga* Volume 1, no. 1 (New York: Image Comics, March 2012).

and down into the action. But more broadly, the words introduce the precarious thematic balance between the transcendent and the material, between the idea and the thing making it real.

Saga's opening phrase expresses a separation, a disruptive movement from the comfort of unity to the distinction of existence. In short, it expresses the paradox of birth. The phrase instigates the move from ideal to substance, placed in sharp relief against the face of Alana, the laboring mother. In its opening line, *Saga* initiates its guiding analogy: life and art, genes and genres, are processes of continuity as much as processes of creation. But human creation is never *ex nihilo*. Creation is more like renovation, genes and cellular structures swirling in new compositions. Recalling the combinatorial strategies of *Building Stories*, *Saga* posits the comics page as a space of convergence and contestation between the abstractions of art history and the material iterations of art as it is read and consumed in time. *Saga* expresses this semantic shift by showing not the product of creation, Hazel, but her straining mother. Strategically this choice suspends readers between the compression of pregnancy and the expansion of birth, aligning them with the contractions of Alana's uterus. The page drags us from the concept, the idea created outside of time, to its real container and its physical presence. Here Vaughan and Staples, like McGuire and Ware, weave the path of comics as an art form into the stories their medium can tell. The page reminds us that creation implicates bodies and the consequences of their actions. Its movement is from gestation to lineage.

Here *Saga* earns its title. More than just recounting an ordeal, more than the representation of a series of events, the saga inscribes family, reproducing it within the bounds of story. For Umberto Eco, the saga is interested in the "lapse of time," the genealogy, of family.⁵² Genealogy is not the same as history, it does not work in as strictly linear fashion – members of

⁵² Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 87.

families only imperfectly succeed one another, and it is this generational overlap that *Saga* uses to build its tension. The book begins at the moment of birth, a singular event, but one that signals the incipient moment of the line. By drawing birth away from pure creation and toward composition, *Saga* reminds its readers that birth is continuity – the materials of the past encounter the present in a process of shaping the products of the future. Vaughan and Staples inscribe the process of comics storytelling within the labor of birth. More than this, they implicate the conventional iterations of the comics form in the marketplace, the serial comic book, in the process of lineage formation. In *Saga*, the story and the object that contains it move together through time. This mirroring, like what we have seen with the temporal manipulations of McGuire and Ware, allows *Saga* to interrogate the hybridity of comics in the field of cultural production, evoking the historical legacy of epic storytelling within the industrial conditions of mass art. *Saga* tacitly acknowledges not only the cultural respect awarded to genres like saga and epic but also their populist roots. Lest the series' commitment to hybridity remain too subtle, *Saga* represents the composite nature of this encounter by endowing Hazel, the child in the process of being born on this first page, with wings and horns both, the physical markers of racial affiliation and the transgressive miscegenation of her parents. Like the female protagonist of *Building Stories*, Hazel bears the combined features of her parents, a living image of the mixing of time and lineage involved in composing a life. She is a metaphor for continuity and its capacity to renovate, to remix the elements of the past into new configurations.

Saga's first page is aware of itself as a moment of composition and an extension of generic conventions in time. It is open, reflecting the confused compression of the moment of transition when internal gestation becomes external life. It disallows readers from separating this conceptual-temporal work from its representation. It is itself the result of the ideas of its creators

becoming real. The page announces itself as a site of exploration for the movement of ideas, the art we create to instantiate them, and the objects we produce to distribute them across time. As *Saga* composes its genetic materials in threads of continuity, so it does for its generic materials. Alternation and change across time, like memory in *Building Stories*, inflects format as much as narrative. The self-conscious temporality of *Saga*'s narrative is never incidental. Since its beginning, the series has operated through short narrative arcs of six issue clusters. In between each set of six is a hiatus, generally six months long. Each set is collected into a single trade paperback, published during the hiatus. The series publication is aware of the changing conditions of comics in the marketplace, providing multiple opportunities for new readers to jump into the story and for existing readers to purchase the story in different formats and combinations – a commercialized concern that would likely make Ware cringe. The composition of *Saga* across formats in physical time connects it to different sets of readers on different timelines. In its iteration as a floppy comic book pamphlet, *Saga* finds its lineage in the traditional patrons of the specialty comic book shop stretching back to the transition out of newsstand sales in the 1970s. In its iteration as a series of discrete trade paperback books, *Saga* connects to more recent generations of readers who approach comic books and graphic novels with the habituations of literary culture. The iteration of *Saga* as the oversized hardcover *Saga Book I*, which collects the first 18 issues of the series along with sketches, scripts, and other paratextual materials, connects the series to the world of high art publication.⁵³ In each case, *Saga* is variously compressed and expanded across physical time, offering a series of distinct options for how readers encounter its layers of mediation.

⁵³ Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples, *Saga: Book I* (New York: Image Comics, 2014).

Saga remains self-aware of the pathways narrative cuts as it navigates the artistic and cultural marketplace. The comic invites readers to see lines of convergence and contestation across both genes and genres as each unfolds its story across time. We observe this strategy in allusion and in visual reference. The first page alone activates memoir in the form of Hazel's recollection, action in the kinetic strain of Alana's face, fabliaux in the vulgarity of Alana's exclamation. Across the series, *Saga* remains consistently pluri-generic, drawing on tropes from science fiction, space opera, domestic drama, and especially romance, further suturing the radical genetic mixing of its pint-sized protagonist to the generic heterogeneity of comic book history. But romance, and its modern harlequin iterations, emerges from the soup to drive both the story and the meaning of *Saga*. Alana and Marko come together under the auspices of a shared passion for *A Night Time Smoke*, pulpy romance novel written by G. Oswald Heist. *A Night Time Smoke* follows the un-adventures of a rock monster and the daughter of a quarry owner. They meet, fall in love, and live a mundane life. For Alana and Marko, the book allegorizes the political transgressions involved in their relationship, crossing political and cultural boundaries. The ultimately boring plot of *A Night Time Smoke* defies our expectations of its genre, melodramatic romance, indicated graphically by its cover.⁵⁴ (Fig. 3.14) This disconnect emblemizes the hybrid genre debts of the action of *Saga*. In experimenting with generic convention, the series exploits the capacity of the comics medium to condense varied narrative fragments and historical iterations into a single charged present. By rendering itself a narrative and material reflection of a popular and populist genre (serial romance), *Saga* exposes the bourgeois field of production that comics have tapped into as a way of challenging distinctions of low and high. The series consistently replicates the action of its first page, introducing ideas drawn from comics history

⁵⁴ Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples, "Chapter Three," *Saga* Volume 1, no. 3 (New York: Image Comics, May 2012).

and from popular culture and drawing them down into the real life conditions of its characters. *Saga* evokes, on its pages and between its various covers, the generic and material miscegenation of its medium, drawing its readers into a shared suspension with the past.

Saga's first page articulates the past within the present, through a voice from the future, denoting the passage of time and patient reflection while dropping us into the visceral exertion of birth. The page manages to hold readers suspended in this incipience *and* communicate a threshold of action. We rest at the point of contact between past and present. Birth itself mixes the heady emotions of love, fear, and commitment with the reality of mucus, amniotic fluid, and sweat. It is at once beautiful and gross. The page perfectly captures this in Alana's first words to us: "am I shitting? It feels like I'm shitting." (Fig. 3.13) There is a vulgarity in Alana's words, her crude language evocative of the real experience of many women and their bodies in the process of labor. The page is unafraid to represent this personal moment in its reality. *Saga* finds the heart of comics in a birth, a moment charged with the legacy of the past and the potential of the future. The form has always found its lineage in mythology and romance, genres that have at once captured the popular imagination and been vehicles for the highest artistic ambitions. But *Saga* acutely draws attention to how these contradictions influence story and narrative in the contemporary literary marketplace. Distinctions of value become more difficult to maintain in a work like *Saga*, which so consistently builds itself, composes its characters and their relationships, out of the diverse cultural legacies of literary and visual history without respect to the differentials in value attributed to its generic conventions.

In charging the present moment with the lineage of the past and the anticipation of the future, *Saga* is a metaphor for comics overall. The form holds fast to its own legacy in the mass production of the newspapers and the pulp magazines. It remembers its deployment in the

service of nationalism (the “Golden Age” of the 1930s and 1940s) and its subsequent turn toward introspection and personal responsibility (the “Silver Age” of the 1960s and 1970s). It recalls its innovations and its renovations, its shifting readerships and commercial prospects. It remembers its stigmas. And yet the combined historical weight of all that shit emerges on its pages, packaged between two hard covers, now finding itself swamped in awards and entrenched on bestseller lists. *Saga*’s innovations to the comics form originate in a moment of slippage between the sublime emergence of new life and the quotidian movement of the bowels. I can think of no better metaphor for how the past and the present, the high and the low, converge in the pages of comics. *Saga*’s opening page condenses these energies, the historical legacies that fuel them, the future they help shape, and the threads of continuity that suture them in time. In its most primal, biological vernacular, *Saga* teaches us that ideas, objects, and people move through time along the pathways of continuity, both genetic and generic.

To return briefly to where we began, contemporary comics, emblemized by *Ms. Marvel*, mark a series of encounters, between old and new, between high and low, and between material and digital. Kamala Khan embodies how comics interface time and value in the canon and the academy that built it. *Ms. Marvel* is an allegory for comics, its capacity to stretch across narrative, genre, and format, and its responsiveness as it is pulled across cultural domains. As Gardner writes, the medium “has necessarily foregrounded the activities of selection, combination, and navigation from its origins,” orienting it toward the needs of an era “marked by a shift toward the open-ended combinations of the database.”⁵⁵ Comics challenge readers and scholars to rethink how they approach the objects of their inquiry in the digital age. The form activates the mechanics of humanism, mediating encounters between time, value and readership.

⁵⁵ Gardner, *Projections*, 149.

Inherent in comics are the temporal and cultural dynamics that invite humanists out of their institutional complacencies, challenging them to recognize technological mediation in both the transcendent continuity and the materiality of cultural production. Comics carries Dante's vernacular torch in its capacity to bridge the division of old and new that has defined modernity – the comics form holds together the analog sequences of the machine and the digital combinations of the microchip. The convergence of old and new in comics reveals humanism's lineage and its capacity to expose the dynamics of cultural capital that define the relationship between literary culture and the academy which authorizes and critiques it. As Art Spiegelman has said: "to me it's just all on one continuum, and it's all the same stuff. I'm equally interested in painting and Bazooka Joe comics."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Roger Sabin, "Interview with Art Spiegelman (1989)," transcribed from original audio tapes by Joseph Witek, in *Art Spiegelman: Conversations*, ed. Joseph Witek (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 99.

CHAPTER 4

ONLINE LEARNING, MOOCS, AND THE EMERGENCE OF POSTHUMAN HUMANISM

Higher learning in the digital age is poised between algorithm and heuristic. The ever more visible mediations of technology influencing the practices and environments of teaching rely on the algorithm: precision and procedure resulting in consistency, standardization, and transferability. And yet, higher learning continues to cleave toward the messier mode of the heuristic, informal processes of trial and error where inquiry seeks uncertain and unpredictable discovery. Higher education, and especially the humanities, have traditionally relied on such discovery in the quest to express relationships between art, culture, and humanity. The drama of higher education in the age of disruption casts algorithm and human as antagonists when they might be better recognized as a still-forming ecosystem. Like the vernacular printed book and the comic book, higher education finds itself in a position of convergence in time and contestation of value grounded by technological mediation. Higher learning today demands the synthesis of ideas, people, and the objects used to make ideas real. This emerging digitality is not a radical break but, as Manuel De Landa envisions it in *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, “one more element added to a complex mix, fully coexisting with older components (energetic and material), not all of which have been left in the past.”¹ My thesis in this chapter is that shifts in the practices and platforms of educational technology challenge the invisible constraints of higher learning as they have evolved in the history of the university. I frame this challenge not as a disruptive force circumscribing tradition, but as a generative continuity with the broad historical project of higher learning and the mediations that have always animated it.

¹ Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 98.

Institutionalized practices of teaching and learning have, over time, become tacitly canonized. The so-called disruptions of innovation expose that this pedagogical canon – just like the textual one – is contingent, determined not by stability in time but by negotiations of value rooted in encounters between the legacy of the humanist past and the determinations of the posthumanist future. Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that technological mediation operates not as a form of disruption but as a facilitator of continuity. Innovative environments of teaching and learning make visible the stakes of this proposition for higher education’s future. This chapter recognizes the relative perceptions of educational value that shape technological mediation in both alignment with and opposition to traditional methods of higher learning. Reading *through* the interface between material and digital education reveals a shared history of inquiry and the formation of interpretive communities still at work in American higher education amid the pulses of technological change. In what follows, I reread the history of humanist inquiry and its encounters with mediation through the contested boundary of the screen.

In this chapter, I claim that education transacted through algorithm carries the weight and substance of the humans on either side of the interface, opening online learning environments to the negotiations of value that have historically privileged physical institutions and environments of learning. This recognition is vital to the contemporary enterprise of higher education, considering that educating students online is no longer proposition or potential: it is reality.² In the first half of this chapter, I introduce the online discussion forum as a site of convergence and contest in the ongoing negotiations between technological mediation and humanist knowledge-making. I briefly review scholarship on forum management to provide a framework for

² In *College (Un)Bound*, Jeffrey Selingo presents telling data: “in 2002, 1.6 million students were enrolled in at least one online course. By 2010, that number had soared to 6.1 million, about 31 percent of overall enrollment in higher education in the United States.” Jeffrey Selingo, *College (Un)Bound* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 97.

analyzing threads in two sessions of the MOOC “Comic Books and Graphic Novels,” taught by Dr. William Kuskin of the University of Colorado Boulder in the fall of 2013 and fall of 2014.³ Each of my case studies showcases encounters between art and people dispersed in time and space, negotiating interactive networks, and augmenting the historical legacy of the humanities seminar as it has been defined by controlled transactions occurring between a small number of authorized agents. These forum threads demonstrate that in constructing new pathways of knowledge transmission from teacher to learner and from learner to learner, MOOCs embed themselves within the lineage of humanist inquiry. In the second part of the chapter, then, I explore the conditioning logic of modern higher education – that the betterment of the individual leads to the betterment of society as a whole – as an intersection of authenticity and artifice that MOOCs, and their challenge to traditional pathways of cultural capital in the university, interrogate. To unpack this challenge, I follow a shared anxiety over the integrity of the individual and the encroachment of the machine from the exploration of mechanical reproduction expressed by Walter Benjamin to the networked posthumanism of N. Katherine Hayles. Emergent digital learning platforms like MOOCs do not fully dissolve the individual subject into the noise of the network. But they do challenge the stability and presence of place and person on which humanities education has traditionally and uncritically relied.

A single chapter does not provide enough space to treat the many aspects and implications of MOOCs comprehensively, but some context is useful. Since their dramatic rise in

³ “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” is an xMOOC, referring to the second wave of MOOCs, c. 2012, led by Silicon Valley startups like Coursera and Udacity, along with the Harvard initiative edX. xMOOCs are distinct from cMOOCs (“connectivist MOOC”), an earlier endeavor toward scaled open online learning developed circa 2008 by the Canadian educator George Siemens.

visibility during 2012 (the “year of the MOOC”),⁴ MOOCs have provided education for millions of learners around the world. These courses are often provided at little to no cost to the learner, although they generally incur high costs to the sponsoring university in terms of development, production, and manpower hours. The major MOOC providers are Coursera (a company started by engineering faculty at Stanford University) and edX (a collaborative initiative growing out of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology). MOOC providers offer a variety of individual courses, sequences of several linked courses called specializations, professional certificates, and now fully accredited graduate degree programs in a variety of fields. Generally speaking, the most popular MOOCs cluster in the professional fields of business, data analytics, computer programming, and engineering. But interested learners can explore philosophy, music, classics, and other traditionally humanistic disciplines. “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” falls into this latter category, capitalizing on the insurgent popularity of comics in the popular imagination and increased academic attention. In this way, “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” allegorizes the relationship MOOCs have struck with higher education: the popular upstart exerting pressure on the dominant establishment. In “Comic Books and Graphic Novels,” content aligns with the mode of mediation. For this reason, I have chosen it to explore the legacy of vernacular time latent in the digital dispersal of online teaching and learning practices.

In framing this argument, I have made two strategic choices: which MOOC, and what part of it. The MOOC I have chosen drew learners not traditionally recognized within or attracted to academic study, especially the academic study of literature, to varying degrees. In

⁴ Laura Pappano, “The Year of the MOOC,” *The New York Times*, November 2, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/04/education/edlife/massive-open-online-courses-are-multiplying-at-a-rapid-pace.html>.

“Comic Books and Graphic Novels,” many users were long-time comics collectors, casual new fans, comics creators or practitioners themselves, or individuals employed in fields like publishing and graphic design. These constituencies, and the approaches they take to their objects of study, widen what has been institutionally expected in the humanities disciplines. MOOCs like this invite questions: what happens to both literary and visual analysis inside and outside the parameters of conventional academic study? What happens when the intimate act of close reading encounters the scale and scope of the Internet? Diversity of experience and personal histories engender intense debates over the validity and the scope of art and its interpretation in these forums. This MOOC showcases the online educational space as “an ongoing site of struggle and contestation,” as Henry Giroux describes it, “shaped in the intersection between social and cultural reproduction, on the one hand, and the disruptions produced through competing, resisting, and unsettling practices and discourses on the other.”⁵ “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” is an ideal space for exploring how the ongoing manipulation of the textual canon interfaces the current challenges facing the pedagogical one.

I also had to choose what aspect of the MOOC to focus on. Discussion forums may seem an odd selection, as forums are arguably the most recognizable and conventional features of an otherwise contested platform. In many MOOCs, discussion forums are a key axis for social and communal learning, distinct from content delivery mechanisms (lecture videos) and automated assessment (quizzes, tests, and algorithmically distributed peer assessment tools). The basic architecture of the forum will be familiar to anyone who has used the Internet since the late 1990s: topics, threads, posts, and replies. But this is where scale changes things: the scale of

⁵ Henry Giroux, “Is there a place for cultural studies in colleges of education?”, in Henry Giroux, Colin Lankshear, Peter McLaren, and Michael Peters, *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 43.

forums in a MOOC and its relative lack of instructor and administrator moderation imports the unstable and unpredictable participatory nature of the wider web into a previously controlled educational environment. Precisely because they are too big to be closely and comprehensively monitored, discussion forums represent the best chance MOOCs have to make good on their claims to provide dispersed and diverse educational experiences on the personal level and at scale. Thus bonded by interpretive intimacy even as they are fractured by space and time, MOOC forums open these courses to analysis from the perspective of humanist pedagogy. They leverage the dispersed network made possible by the platform to create *ad hoc* communities of inquiry. But despite their broad dispersal and relative lack of moderation, MOOC forums cultivate relationships of intellectual and personal intimacy, evoking some of the very best effects of the standard humanities seminar.

At its heart, this chapter recognizes that elaborating the networked learning that occurs in MOOCs requires attention to how technological mediation conditions educational environments and the knowledge they produce. The traditional features of the physical seminar, along with the behaviors of its professors, instructors, and students, have been by virtue of their ubiquity rendered invisible. Teachers and students take for granted the physical boundaries – buildings, hallways, doors, walls, tables, and desks – that shape the environments in which they learn. Physical space conditions the minds as much as the bodies of students and teachers in acts of learning and teaching, a process defined by an in/out binary: learn inside, apply outside. Colin Lankshear, Michael Peters, and Michele Knobel call these features of traditional education “spaces of enclosure” which “operate in concert to separate educational engagement from wider

spheres of social practice.”⁶ These invisible enclosures, and the practices their structures reinforce, solidify their influence by their unregistered presence, silently proclaiming this is *the way things are done*. The lineage of these educational practices is long, and has become so intertwined with the nature of humanist inquiry as to make the latter appear impossible in the absence of the former. As ubiquity leads to invisibility, so invisibility leads to uncritical acceptance. To be sure, Internet protocols that facilitate our movements through the web are largely invisible to the average user, and they still represent a kind of inside and outside distinction. But from the perspective of design and use, the MOOC is marked by a distinct openness, a freedom of practice in the moment. MOOCs and other online learning platforms mark stages in a shift away from transmission of authority to the design of communal networked learning, inhabited by a number of different agents facilitating the production of knowledge. In this way, they extend the humanist legacy of the vernacular printed book and the comic book. MOOC discussion forums confront students and educators at the intersection of pedagogical practice, institutional memory, and technological mediation. In that intersection, boundaries of time and space ease, and disruption gives way to continuity. MOOCs reveal the potential for leveraging digital modalities of education into a global community of engaged learners.

The Generosity of the Network

The security of the seminar room has been sustained by habit and convention. According to Lawrence Veysey, the seminar was one of the three core developments of the modern

⁶ Peter Lankshear, Michael Peters, and Michele Knobel, “Critical Pedagogy and Cyberspace,” in Henry Giroux, Colin Lankshear, Peter McLaren, and Michael Peters, *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 154.

university as it took shape across the last decades of the nineteenth century, along with the laboratory and the modern lecture.⁷ The seminar exemplifies the potential for physical presence to generate the positive effects of learning between teacher and student, explored in the first chapter of this dissertation. But conventional wisdom, which urges diverse environments of learning toward the ideal of the seminar, can obscure the value of other educational modes. Because MOOCs are often driven by the delivery of lecture content, and because of their sheer scale, they lose what William Deresiewicz describes in *Excellent Sheep* as “the kind of interchange and incitement that can only happen in a seminar.”⁸ Learning in digital environments is positioned as another form of passive consumption. The study of student learning behavior through data analytics drives content, and carries an attendant loss of rigor and provocation. This derision of MOOCs is rooted in a perception of cheapening and erosion, a sentiment captured vividly toward the end of Deresiewicz’s book:

And now, of course, come the MOOCs, those massive open online courses. Why anybody sees them as an answer is a mystery to me. Yes, they are cheaper, but they also make what’s bad about the current situation even worse. Students complain that their professors are remote, so we’re going to make them more remote (literally so, in fact). They feel that they have little contact with their teachers, so we won’t allow them any. They need challenging assignments and detailed, individualized feedback, so we’re going to give them multiple-choice quizzes that we grade by machine. Online instruction isn’t just conducted on the Web; it embodies an idea of knowledge that’s been shaped by the Web—by

⁷ Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 153.

⁸ William Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), Kindle edition, loc. 2527.

Google, by Wikipedia—a confusion of information with understanding. I still don't get why a MOOC is substantially more than a sexy textbook...⁹

This kind of critical position finds a boogeyman in MOOCs, a scapegoat for the pressures facing institutions of higher learning in recent decades. The argument presumes that the conditioning factors of the humanities seminar – physical presence in an enclosed learning environment, knowledge transfer from teacher to student, assessment and approval via instructional authority – should define a platform designed with an architecture of open engagement and the formation of *ad hoc* networks. Deresiewicz argues that the nature of the interface, the way the learner interacts with instructional materials, grounds his claim that MOOCs represent learning that confuses “information with understanding.” This is a clever rhetorical move, but it suffers from an inherent privileging of the traditional environments of understanding at the expense of new relationships between information and its interpretation in the digital age. Deresiewicz observes the surface of the interface, but does not read *through* it.

Criticisms of MOOCs rooted in a perceived antipathy between learning and technology neglect the history of technological mediation that has conditioned the production of knowledge through the lineage of higher education. MOOCs inhabit a larger and more diverse ecosystem than conventional physical classrooms, with borders much more porous. Students are not just consumers of knowledge, they are users of the educational environment and all of its functionality.¹⁰ In the digital age, the distinction between using and consuming weakens, resulting in a situation where, as Manuel Castells argues, “we engage in a process of learning by

⁹ Deresiewicz, *Excellent Sheep*, loc. 2461.

¹⁰ John Hartley connects this sense of “user” as opposed to mere “consumer” to “the emergence of digital, interactive, and participatory media.” John Hartley, *Digital Futures for Cultural and Media Studies* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 2.

producing, in a virtuous feedback between the diffusion of technology and its enhancement.”¹¹

The digital capacities of Web 2.0, defined as much by contribution as by consumption, define the logic of the MOOC. This logic clearly recalls the vernacular printed book, but has been read as a complete departure from the perceived transcendence that has come to govern a liberal arts education. Traditional educational authority flows from instructor to student. But in MOOCs “the receiver can become the transmitter,” to borrow a phrase from Jean Paul Simon.¹² MOOCs challenge the discrete integrity of the subject, teacher and learner alike. This challenge confronts a model of knowledge production that has conditioned our view of learning at least since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and failed to acknowledge the continued presence of technological mediation in the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge. The dissolution of the human into the apparatus of the machine erodes the intimacy built when bodies occupy physical space together; in the digital classroom, bodies do not interact, thus minds do not. So the story goes.

In response, I present as case studies two discussion threads from the forums of “Comic Books and Graphic Novels.” I begin with a brief review of the discourse and rhetoric of discussion forums, from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. I then provide my own close readings of selected forum threads from two sessions of the MOOC. The forums in both sessions are open and largely un-moderated. They augment the pre-recorded video content, textual and visual reference material, quizzes, and peer-assessed assignments and projects. But, importantly, these forums displace instructional authority with respect to participant interaction

¹¹ Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28.

¹² Jean Paul Simon, “Moving to Digital Media Worlds: Three Successive Transformational Waves,” in *Digital Media Worlds: The New Economy of Media*, ed. by Giudetta De Prato, Esteve Sanz, and Jean Paul Simon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 27.

in practices of interpretation, knowledge making, and coalition building. This kind of community building reorients our expectation of the “value unit” of the MOOC, from the content of the lecture (the *information* of the course) to the network of *interactions* negotiated by users.¹³ My thesis for this section is that technological mediation, far from inhibiting, automating, or neutering, facilitates powerful acts of interpretive intimacy through algorithmic representation. The forum threads showcased here feature learners in their formative moments of learning, negotiating a relationship to art in time through the interface of the screen.

Despite the interpretive and analytical potential of discussion forums to yield a picture of how users interact in educational environments at scale, they are largely neglected in critical discussions about MOOCs. What few acknowledgements there are dismiss them out of hand or quantify them in an attempt to aid instructional teams in rendering them useful or more conducive to moderation. In the former case, take for instance Robert A. Rhoads’ treatment of the discussion forum in his book *MOOCs, High Technology, and Higher Learning*: “furthermore, even in a large lecture hall there is at least the potential for students to raise challenging questions from time to time, with the likelihood of an instructor’s response. Or perhaps a conversation with classmates might arise subsequent to the lecture. This is not necessarily the case in the scaled-up xMOOC, where interactions with a real professor are rare

¹³ I draw the term “value unit” from Geoffrey G. Parker, Marshall W. Van Alstyne, and Sangeet Paul Choudary’s *Platform Revolution*. While true that “platform technologies” like MOOCs allow “hundreds of thousands of students to simultaneously attend lectures by the world’s most skilled instructors, at minimal cost, and available anywhere in the world that the Internet is available,” my contention is that the lecture isn’t the true location of value in the course, at least from the perspective of learners. Geoffrey G. Parker, Marshall W. Van Alstyne, and Sangeet Paul Choudary, *Platform Revolution: How Networked Markets are Transforming the Economy and How to Make Them Work for You* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 38, 266.

and conversations with classmates are limited by a lack of face-to-face connection.”¹⁴ Rhoads’ criticism of MOOC forums actually reads like a criticism of traditional classrooms. If the lecture, the ideal university class format, only affords the *potential* for students to engage directly “from time to time,” and only affords that conversations between students *might* arise, it certainly cannot be a standard against which to compare a large discussion forum with thousands of interactions between thousands of participants. As well, the argument proceeds from the assumption that peer-to-instructor interactions are inherently more valuable than peer-to-peer ones, and then dismisses MOOC forums for their relative lack of the former. Rhoads’ critique posits technological mediation as a barrier to meaningful engagement.

The post-MOOC survey administered to participants of “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” challenges Rhoads’ assumption of the value of physical presence. For the first session, in response to the question “I think the course would be significantly improved with more instructor contact,” 13.8% absolutely agree, 25% agree, 42.2% were neutral, 17% disagree, and just under 2% absolutely disagree.¹⁵ In the second session, the numbers were comparable: 8.2% absolutely agree, 32% agree, 44.2% neutral, 14.1% disagree, and 1.5% absolutely disagree. These results suggest that a majority of participants did not feel that the course suffered due to its relative lack of direct instructor involvement, at least relative to student involvement in the forums. Peer-based activities like the forums emerge as a cherished element of the course. When asked to rate the different course components, a majority of respondents in both sessions said

¹⁴ Robert A. Rhoads, *MOOCs, High Technology & Higher Learning* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 98.

¹⁵ The data from all surveys quoted here was generated using Qualtrics software, copyright 2016 Qualtrics. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA, <http://www.qualtrics.com>.

that the discussion forums were very good or good.¹⁶ My point here is not to pit Rhoads' criticism against two particular instances of MOOC discussion forums. My critique is aimed at the cultural logic that predisposes scholars like Rhoads to assume that the quality (or even presence) of conversation is diminished in inverse proportion to the number of participants. This logic devalues peer-to-peer engagement as legitimate learning and diminishes the capacity for knowledge production to occur digitally.¹⁷ It acknowledges mediation only as a function of technology, not as a conditioning factor in all spaces in which teachers and learners come together, digital or otherwise.

The liabilities of technologically mediated communication, especially in educational settings, often overshadow the affordances. Sherry Turkle, a psychologist who has written extensively on the digital turn in higher education and in culture more broadly, also takes aim at large-scale online discussion forums. Turkle argues, in *Reclaiming Conversation*, “we necessarily idealize the online experience” when looking for ways to fix higher education, and that “participating in an online forum is glamorized as always-available discussion.”¹⁸ Turkle then draws this glamour down to earth by noting “in practice, thousands of people flow through

¹⁶ 33.9% very good and 38.5% good for the first session, 30.4% very good and 35.8% good for the second session.

¹⁷ In the study “Virtually unlimited classrooms: Pedagogical practices in massive open online courses,” one of the few that addresses discussion forums substantively, Rhoads and his coauthors find that, while forums appear “to be a valuable resource” for “independent learners,” threads that contain meaningful exchanges between participants are outliers, “and the vast majority of discussion prompts garnered limited discussion with only a handful of peer responses or none at all.” Rhoads and his coauthors find that most of the MOOCs they study contain discussion forums, but that “most were used by peers or teaching assistants to explain specific assignments or concepts as opposed to facilitating meaningful collaboration and group-oriented knowledge construction.” Brit Toven-Lindsey, Robert A. Rhoads, and Jennifer Berdan Lozano, “Virtually Unlimited Classrooms: Pedagogical practices in massive open online courses” *Internet and Higher Education* 24 (2014): 7-9.

¹⁸ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 233.

such groups. Sometimes you make a comment that is noticed, but more often it is not picked up. Not by anyone.”¹⁹ While it may not be glamorous, the discussion capacity of MOOCs is, literally, always available. And certainly not all forum participants are online and conversing at the same time, but neither is this the case for the more traditional environment of the lecture hall posited by Rhoades. It is not even the case with traditional seminar rooms, where often a small group of participators dominate the conversation at the expense of others. Implicit in the work of Rhoads and Turkle is the conviction that online discussion is inherently less valuable than discussion in real life. But, as David Backer has written for *Hybrid Pedagogy*, “saying an online discussion is a worse version of an IRL [“in real life”] discussion is like saying an apple is a worse version of an orange.”²⁰ The nature of the conversation, and the parameters for its success, are as different as the features of the discussion medium. We should not be “disappointed with an apple because it is a bad orange” – the task of the humanities educator is to determine what the apple tastes like.²¹ While the scope of this chapter cannot encompass all patterns of behavior in all MOOCs, I can claim with confidence that “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” refutes the characterization of Turkle and the logic of Rhoads with respect to discussion forums, as will be demonstrated below. MOOC forum threads challenge the modality of the traditional classroom by breaking apart the bonds of authority that define it, opening the educational space to a collective structure. The literature on discussion forum management to date has only begun to unpack the implications of this mode of engagement in learning environments.

To understand the network is to read closely the interactions and relations among its nodes. While the literature on discussion forums is robust and growing fast, it has largely

¹⁹ Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation*, 233.

²⁰ David Backer, “The Purpose of Online Discussion,” *Hybrid Pedagogy*, March 22, 2016, <http://www.digitalpedagogylab.com/hybridped/purpose-online-discussion/>.

²¹ Backer, “The Purpose of Online Discussion.”

focused on the what and how, rather than the why (this becomes especially acute with the increased attention in the era of the MOOC). As Mary Kayler and Karen Weller point out, “online communities of practice offer much to the learner in terms of cognitive and affective development and opportunities for growth as independent learners. Online communities offer students opportunities to practice newly acquired language in a supportive environment with peers.”²² But how do educators acknowledge and analyze those opportunities? The response falls into three categories: analysis of social and communal interactions, discourse analysis, and taxonomies of user types. All three categories focus primarily on identifying user behaviors and classifying what they say and how they say it. With respect to MOOC discussion forums, classification and identification is a vital first step: there is such a tremendous amount of material that researchers require quantitative approaches over qualitative. This holds true even for most studies of discourse and content, often relying on keyword frequencies to interpret user engagement. Research has proceeded from a position of accommodating that scale.

The first category, analysis of interactions, is the broadest in scope. Drawing heavily on emerging techniques of social network analysis (SNA), these studies explore patterns of influence in the networks of forum users, tracking post frequency and user navigation.²³ But in large and complex forums, distinguishing between effective learning and simple participation is vital. As Margaret Mazzolini and Sarah Maddison claim, “although the rate of student participation and the length of their discussion threads may be common intuitive ways used by

²² Mary Kayler and Karen Weller, “Pedagogy, Self-Assessment, and Online Discussion Groups,” *Educational Technology & Society* 10, no. 1 (2007): 144.

²³ For examples of this strategy, see Ramón Tirado, Ángel Hernando, José Ignacio Agudé, “The effect of centralization and cohesion on the social construction of knowledge in discussion forums,” *Interactive Learning Environments* (2012): 1-24; Lori Breslow, et. al., “Studying Learning in the World Wide Classroom: Research into edX’s First MOOC,” *Research & Practice in Assessment* 8 (2013): 13-25.

instructors to judge the health of their discussion forums, our initial research showed that it is far from clear that they are useful measures to judge the quality of the learning taking place there.”²⁴ Research into the type, frequency, and quality of social interactions on discussion forums and in online learning environments is still a changing and evolving endeavor. The difficulty with handling forums of this scale is the quantitative/qualitative divide: scale invites a quantitative approach, but these are often a poor measure for the quality of learning taking place in the forums. This disconnect has contributed to forums remaining often attended but not read, at least not with sufficiently deep interpretive attention.

The second category of research, discourse (or content) analysis, attempts to parse how effective user learning is in discussion forum environments by tracing keywords and particular deployments of language. Data mining approaches, common in this research, struggle to balance the qualitative needs of learning with the scale of discussion forums.²⁵ For example, in the study

²⁴ Margaret Mazzolini, Sarah Maddison, “When to jump in: The role of the instructor in online discussion forums,” *Computers & Education* 49 (2007): 195. Expressing criteria for evaluating the quality of interactions in online discussion forums has been a noted site of contention in the literature. As Christopher Brinton et al point out, “as a course reaches a larger audience, its forum is often flooded by discussions from many students. Thus, it quickly becomes infeasible for anyone to navigate the discussions to find course-relevant information.” Christopher G. Brinton et. al., “Learning About Social Learning in MOOCs: From Statistical Analysis to Generative Model,” *IEEE Transactions on Learning Technologies* 7, no. 4 (2014): 346. Jonathan Huang et al handle the balance of scale and quality by identifying and categorizing what they call “superposters,” the top 5% of forum participants based on a quality rating defined by the average number of votes on the posts. Jonathan Huang, et. al., “Superposter behavior in MOOC forums,” *L@S* (2014): 120.

²⁵ For example: Raafat George Saadé and Qiong Huang, “Meaningful Learning in Discussion Forums: Towards Discourse Analysis,” *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology* 6 (2009): 87-99; Miaomiao Wen, Diyi Yang, and Carolyn Penstein Rosé, “Sentiment Analysis in MOOC Discussion Forums: What does it tell us?,” *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Educational Data Mining* (2014): 130-137; Laurie P. Dringus and Timothy Ellis, “Using data mining as a strategy for assessing asynchronous discussion forums,” *Computers & Education* 45 (2005): 141-160; Fu-Ren Lin, Lu-Shih Hsieh, and Fu-tai Chuang, “Discovering genres of online discussion threads via text mining,” *Computers & Education* 52 (2009): 481-495.

“Qualitative Analysis of Discussion Forums,” Azevedo et. al. claim “to understand discourse, it is of crucial importance to analyze context and not restrict the analysis to mere word identification. In other words, human communication is context-dependent and always organized as a response to someone or something.”²⁶ And yet, the tool developed for discourse analysis, the “Thematic Relevance Quotient,” relies on an algorithm to express a relationship between “NC” (number of relevant concepts used in the text of a discussion forum post) and “NA” (number of associations between relevant concepts used in the text): $TRQ = NC + NA$.²⁷ So, while human communication is always “context-dependent,” in order to standardize an approach to researching forums, we rely upon our ability to express communication as the result of an equation, which yields categorization. This approach comes closer to accounting for why forum participants interact the way that they do, but it remains unable to account for the rigor of close reading at scale.

The third category produces taxonomies of users and user engagement profiles in online learning environments. Lorenzo A. Rossi and Omprakash Gnawali contend that “there are some universal aspects of online asynchronous discussions that are independent from the language adopted by the participants, but that depend on the types of interactions associated to the threads.”²⁸ Rossi and Gnawali want to train and test a “classifier,” a tool capable of distinguishing between “social/small talk, open ended topics, (un)resolved close ended problems, course logistics, etc.”²⁹ The goal, of course, is to help MOOC instructors determine forum

²⁶ Breno Fabrício Terra Azevedo, Patricia Alejandra Behar, and Eliseo Berni Reategui, “Qualitative Analysis of Discussion Forums,” *International Journal of Computer Information Systems and Industrial Management Applications* 3 (2011): 674.

²⁷ Azevedo, Behar, and Reategui, “Qualitative Analysis,” 674.

²⁸ Lorenzo A. Rossi and Omprakash Gnawali, “Language Independent Analysis and Classification of Discussion Threads in Coursera MOOC Forums,” *IEEE IRI* (2014): 658.

²⁹ Rossi and Gnawali, “Language Independent Analysis,” 660, 658.

threads requiring or inviting their involvement. In addition to classifying thread interactions, this research classifies MOOC users. René Kizilcec et. al. identify four particular modes of engagement with MOOC forums: Completing, Auditing, Disengaging, Sampling.³⁰ Their study concludes that “forum activity...varies significantly between engagement trajectories with medium to large effect sizes, with Completing learners participating at significantly higher rates than learners in other engagement trajectories.”³¹ By this logic, understanding users’ intended roles in the MOOC helps scholars recognize how the platform shapes learning. This research reveals the difficulty in balancing a quantitative understanding of *what is happening* in the forums with a qualitative understanding of *why* what is happening is *important*.

My own research responds to this bias, but takes a different approach than the literature reviewed above. I reveal my disciplinary debts to literary studies in my commitment to close reading texts, even texts (like discussion forum threads) that are not historically acknowledged as legitimate sites of academic inquiry. The question that has historically animated textual inquiry in the humanities – how do people, ideas, and the objects that produce and contain them move through time in tension between continuity and discontinuity? – is the same question that drives these forums. MOOCs aspire to harness the legacy of this inquiry, making visible the legacies of the past that animate their best intentions and the technological mediations of the present that determine their design. For the remainder of this section, I will present my own research into the discussion forums of “Comic Books and Graphic Novels,” demonstrating the capacity of the

³⁰ René F. Kizilcec, Chris Piech, and Emily Schneider, “Deconstructing Disengagement: Analyzing Learner Subpopulations in Massive Open Online Courses,” *LAK’13* (2013): 172. Ashton Anderson provides another taxonomy of MOOC users, identifying five categories: Viewers, Solvers, All-rounders, Collectors, and Bystanders. Ashton Anderson, Daniel Huttenlocher, Jon Kleinberg, and Jure Leskovec, “Engaging with Massive Open Online Courses,” *WWW’14* (2014): no pagination.

³¹ Kizilcec, Piech, and Schneider, “Deconstructing Disengagement,” 175.

forums to challenge the notion that physical presence is required for meaningful learning and engagement to take place in environments of humanities learning.

Both sessions of “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” yielded substantial overall learner enrollments: 39,184 and 38,066 respectively. Only one half to two thirds of that number were active in each session, and fewer still browsed the forums. In the first session, 4,437 learners browsed the discussion forums (11.3%), and in the second 3,447 (9.06%). While those seem like small fractions, those active participants in the forums were *very* active. In Session 1, there were 9,611 individual posts and comments spread across 1,164 distinct forum threads. In the second, 5,309 posts and comments across 636 threads. In courses with only seven active weeks, that is a substantial amount of conversation and engagement. I tracked five categories across these threads: (1) peer-to-peer interactions, (2) peer-to-instructor interactions, (3) resource sharing, (4) knowledge production, and (5) dispute. The last three require some explanation. I defined resource sharing as any interactions rooted in sharing external links, recommendations for tools or software, web or physical resources for analysis and comic book production, strategies for reading and producing comics, and general course-relevant information. Knowledge production I defined as encounters involving more than one participant where new information was synthesized, new skills were developed, or new collaborative networks formed to address an existing question or concern, and evidence existed for the reception of that information. Dispute I defined as exchanges with no good-faith effort toward producing mutual learning experiences. What I found across these diverse threads was a substantial degree of self-motivation and peer-based systems of support. This support extended beyond simply intellectual concerns related to the course and into the inter-personal and emotional registers of knowledge-making.

Both sessions had high levels of peer-to-peer interaction: 63.5% of threads in the first session and 67.9% of threads in the second. The percentage of threads with peer-to-instructor interaction (including the professor, teaching assistants, and instructional staff) was much lower: 12.8% in the first session and 15.4% in the second. Beyond engagement, though, these threads were generative and productive of content knowledge, interpretation and analysis, and the sharing of individual experience. Resource sharing was a common feature, with 29.7% of threads in Session 1 containing some form of resource exchange and 20.4% of threads in Session 2 doing the same. This points to an investment in the practical utility of a course like this. With so many participants, so wide a range of experience, the forums became their own internal, content-specific search engine, with learners asking and answering questions of their peers and guiding each other toward success in the course, particularly with respect to writing assignments and the comic book production project, as well as the application of targeted skills learned beyond the course. This is, in and of itself, a valuable byproduct of the MOOC: its capacity to act as a content-oriented anchor point in a network dispersed across so many different people in so many different places.

But beyond utility, the forums also produced meaningful knowledge, an enduring goal of humanities education and one perceived to be much more difficult if not impossible in widely dispersed and non-hierarchical learning environments. The production of knowledge is a difficult quality to trace, and I fully acknowledge the subjective criteria I used to find it. For an exchange to produce knowledge, it must involve at least one full back-and-forth between at least two participants, and there must be some recognition of a change in perspective, position, or interpretation. This is a difficult task, much more complex than the transmission of content through instruction, and it is something humanities educators strive for in their classrooms. In the

absence of active moderation and guidance, the likelihood of knowledge production occurring in large-scale discussion forums like these is presumably low. Yet, in the first session 11% of threads produced meaningful knowledge; in the second session 9.3% did. If these numbers seem low, consider them in relation to the threads that contained dispute, a more commonly assumed component of online discussion forums: 4.4% in the first, 4.7% in the second. Going into this project, based on my common-sense notions of online discussion forums, I would have assumed the reverse. That my assumption was wrong lends credit to the argument that dispersed networks of thinking and learning can be generative sites of new knowledge and support. In fact, these forums leveraged their lack of physical presence to improve the quality of the discussion and the knowledge making practices taking place there.

These discussion forums are sites of knowledge production and resource sharing, but they are also opportunities for intimate storytelling, the representation and exposure of self. As Ruth E. Page writes in her book *Stories and Social Media*, in social media contexts stories are told “by everyday tellers about their personal experiences,” and these stories “are important discursive and social resources that create identities for their tellers and audiences. Storytelling is an interactive process, traces of which can be seen in the conversational formats of social media and are interwoven between online and offline contexts.”³² As part of a network that bridges the gap between online and offline narratives, and as part of an unfolding of personal and intimate stories, discussion forums expose their aspirations to the arena of transformative humanities education. Each thread considered below presents readers with the difficult realities of online discussion (including misreading of textual cues, misinterpretation, resentment and aggression). But each thread finds participants engaging in thoughtful and substantive conversation, both with

³² Ruth E. Page, *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.

the course materials and with each other. These forums are an archive of thousands of encounters between many people coming to terms, knowingly or otherwise, with humanistic inquiry in the digital age; participants generating transformative education. In actually reading the posts and comments themselves, in full, I am challenging the current state of MOOC scholarship to attend to what is actually happening between the participants in these courses, not just how the relationship between instructor and institution is rhetorically framed by virtue of course design principles or the details of delivery.

Case Study #1

MOOC participants, enrolled from around the world, de-link humanities education and physical presence. Friedrich Kittler writes that in media environments, humankind's "essence escapes into apparatuses" – this construction usefully articulates the anxieties about dissolution into interface that online learning environments trigger.³³ Technology is cast as a mediating agent not constitutive of a new and productive reality but hostile to an existing one. The subject of my first case study, Forum Thread 1 (hereafter "FT1"), drawn from the first session of "Comic Books and Graphic Novels," explores questions of authenticity in the acts of interpretation we perform on works of art in time, and speaks to the insurgent pressure comics has exerted on the academy, renewing questions of originality of authorship, the status of the *auteur*, and the value we attach to authenticity.³⁴ But beyond the content of the thread, its interactions prove what Lee

³³ Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 58.

³⁴ In each of my case studies, I draw on direct evidence from participants in MOOC discussion forums. In consultation with the Institutional Review Board at the University of Colorado Boulder, it was determined that research performed on these data after the fact constituted no risk

Rainie and Barry Wellman claim in *Networked: The New Social Operating System*: “distance is not dead, it is just being renegotiated. Physical presence and absent presence are becoming integrated as the character of public and private spaces changes.”³⁵ FT1 is emblematic in that it begins by questioning the content matter presented by the instructor in the lectures, affirms and expands this worry, and eventually helps refine the definition of interpretation and the judgments of value it entails. In so doing, the thread reproduces some of the major debates that have shaped literary studies across its modern history, including questions of aesthetics, form, context, and authorial intention. By reframing the enduring questions that motivate literary inquiry in the context of interfaces the discipline is still in the process of understanding, the thread stands between humanities past and humanities future. It is a kind of time warp, applying the pressures and anxieties of the somewhat outmoded New Critics to the expanded canon of comic books, all on an emergent technological platform. And yet, despite all this, FT1 is also the story of the personal development of its original poster, the individual learning authentically from the group, no less important to the project of humanities education.

The original poster begins by praising the close reading approach taken to content in the weekly lecture videos. OP writes “there is a part of it I like – I like the idea the Prof discusses with the page from Spider-Man, that it increases the heartbeat of the story, moving from single-panel rows to three and finally four panels as the character passionately discusses his philosophy

to former thread participants and therefore needed no official IRB protocol. I have employed strategies to maintain the anonymity of participants, including concealing thread titles and using the convention Forum Thread 1, Forum Thread 2, etc. Additionally, I have anonymized participants by removing names and gender or sex-identifying pronouns (using the neutral “their”). I have adopted the convention “original poster” (“OP”) for the individual who started the thread, and “R1,” “R2,” “R3,” etc. for each subsequent participant. All appropriate measures were taken to protect the identity of former forum participants in this research.

³⁵ Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 108.

on a date. Awesome...” OP refers to the practice of minute analysis of individual page structures and their effects on narrative meaning recommended by and modeled in the course lectures. They recognize the importance of close analysis to building a relationship between reader and text. But the practice of such close reading also produces an anxiety in OP. Twice in this initial post OP states that they had “never looked at [comics] like this” and that the close reading approach would be difficult to sustain week by week “because it’s not the approach I take with comics.” OP demonstrates a recurring issue in the modern history of literary studies: how to balance the authentic responses of readers, the habits they have formed independent of schooling, with critical and analytical overlays established through academic study. OP’s frame for the issue is individual, but it speaks systemically.

A sentence in the middle of OP’s post, separated by line breaks, helps to suture OP’s individual and systemic concerns. OP writes “But I can’t help but think that we are overanalysing individual pages here and reinterpreting art in a way that it MAY not have been intended.” This anxiety highlights three intersecting issues with respect to literary analysis. First, the idea of “overanalysing” is explicitly attached to the restriction of analysis to “individual pages.” Interpretation of the fragment is devalued in the absence of context. Second, OP describes the analytical action of the course as “reinterpreting,” which implies that there is a first-order, original interpretation, and that the lecture analyses followed only secondarily. Third, this first-order interpretation is passively attributed to the author or creator him or herself through OP’s worry that the course analysis handles comics “in a way that it MAY not have been intended.” The capitalization of “MAY” typographically emphasizes the point but also reveals doubt. OP feels that the creator *did* have an intention and that uncovering this intention should take precedence over any subsequent acts of interpretation. Interpretation, in this post, is cast

variously as a process of building a relationship of meaningful trust between object and reader and also as a means of tracing meaning backwards toward an original in need of recovery.

The first response to OP builds on their momentum. R1 connects with OP by saying their “approach is not uncommon or incorrect,” but then elaborates: “by having this kind of scrutiny and interpretation of details, we’re not only provided with the thrill of investigation and discovery but are able to learn the craft of writing and able to see some of the things that a true craft writer did intend.” On the one hand, interpretation is the “thrill of investigation and discovery,” a personal experience rooted in the individual response to reading. But, on the other, sustained scrutiny also yields knowledge about the “craft of writing” and intentions of the original creator. So R1 mitigates OP’s worry about intention by allowing for the presence of individual interpretation *and* intention. R1, in a sense, both empowers OP as an individual critic and connects that personal discovery to the protocols of literary analysis. As additional participants join the discussion, they strike a balance between individual interpretation as a form of empowerment and the discovery of original meaning. R2 enters the thread with “what I saw from that page was completely different” (from the analysis provided in lecture), proceeding to work through their own interpretation of the page from *Ultimate Spider-man* that occasioned the thread. R3 comments on R2’s post, arguing for a broad spectrum of interpretation, claiming “it’s more about being able to interpret the text and back up your opinion, i [sic] don’t believe there is necessarily a wrong answer if you can do this.” R3’s position is akin to what we might expect in a modern seminar on literary analysis – an ongoing process of interpretation and analysis rooted in evidence. It is a far cry from the anxiety OP expresses in the opening post, rooted in the need to unlock authorial intent.

The sense of individual empowerment through interpretation risks a turn in the conversation toward arguing personal positions instead of points of analysis. This is what happens when R4 enters the conversation to characterize the OP's initial position. R4 begins by claiming, truthfully, "Once it is published it isn't only the artist's work anymore [sic], it belongs to the reader too." R4 continues by referring directly to OP: "you can use them to study, to find deeper truths or just sit back, relax and enjoy a cartoon story like [OP] prefers." The association with light relaxing reading, which was not an explicit aspect of OP's initial position, puts them in a defensive position, responding "whoa there, my friend! Haha. I've never sat back and relaxed to enjoy a 'cartoon story' in my life! I actually take them very seriously and I think you might have misinterpreted me here. :)" This is a fascinating couple of sentences. The initial thrust is halting to the conversation, with OP correcting course. "Whoa there, my friend! Haha" resists to the implication that OP advocated light or non-critical reading. The correction that follows redirects the conversation away from a binary between serious and non-serious reading back toward questions of interpretation. That OP ends with ":", a typographical representation of a smiling face, casts a positive light back on the correction, keeping it from producing a kind of text antagonism that often intrudes in online discussions. This exchange humanizes the participants, implicating their lives and reading practices beyond the confines of the course while still applying the skills developed within it. These sentences expose the strategies (typographical and rhetorical) through which participants negotiate digital interfaces in cultivating engagement.

More important than its strategies for avoiding a devolution into antagonism is how this exchange prompts OP to revise their initial thesis: "It's okay to say, 'This is how I interpret the art/this is how it makes me feel when I see that,' etc, but never, 'The artist did this for that reason'." In this new formulation, OP's anxiety shifts direction. The worry is not that individual

interpretation distorts authorial interpretation, but that the character of individual interpretation could then be used to retroactively attribute causality. This is a more complex question, and the reformulation triggered by R4's comments, I argue, demonstrates a point of growth from the initial posting. Overall, participants in the thread feel a certain pressure to conform to the models of analysis the course material presents, but they also resist this by relying on their gut instincts and their personal histories with reading. These initial exchanges highlight the capacity for MOOC threads to navigate a course between the antagonism and misinterpretation characteristic of the Internet comment section and the respectful and productive conversation of the humanities seminar room. It is a testament to the participants here that this balance skews to the latter absent any instructor moderation.

To this point, the thread has proceeded largely by negotiating personal approaches to interpretation without explicit reference to the relation these bear to academic and scholarly practices. This makes sense, as many MOOC participants are not formally affiliated with colleges and universities, at least at the time of the course. But R1 returns to the thread to draw attention to the relationship between interpretation as it has occurred in the thread and as it occurs in more formal institutions of higher education: "and as I assume most of us are not academic scholars I think we have a wonderful opportunity here because we are without an agenda and are here to learn out of love of comics or sheer curiosity." For R1, this opportunity frees participants from disciplinary debts that might be felt were this conversation happening within the traditional boundaries of the academy. Academic scholarship bears the artificiality of its institutional expectations, whereas this thread is more purely responsive, more primitively interpretive. R1's argument exposes distinctions between motivated or unmotivated analysis and steps toward access and authenticity of knowledge itself. As R12 puts it in another post,

“sometimes a coffee pot is just a coffee pot and not some kind of deep psychological analogy.”

The passive resistance to perceptions of scholarly activity in statements like this speaks to the tension surrounding the production of knowledge in open online spaces like these forums.

The work of scholars and critics within the academy comes under increased scrutiny, albeit in humorous fashion, in a sustained mock critical analysis that dominates the thread for several exchanges. An anonymous poster, R16, writes “Ok I think this is getting too serious. Let’s play a game: Is it possible to overanalyse?” and posts a comic book image of Captain America by Rob Liefeld, famous for its exaggerated and distorted bodily proportions (Fig. 4.1). R16 provides four alternate interpretations, their “favorite” being “it introduced the possibility [sic] of a parallel earth where people have different bones.” The clear intention is a send-up of the artificiality of interpretation. But R9 responds, while acknowledging the joke (“*grin*”), by finding “plenty to say about the image in all seriousness.” Their analysis includes a reading of character (“this is stern, all soldier Steve”), a reading of the performativity of gender (“a kid’s version of what being a man is like -- all muscle, no sex”), and a reading of comparative media (“a complete contrast to the recent cinematic depiction”). R9’s response is a litany of contemporary interpretive methodologies recast as a glib response to R16’s sarcasm. Other participants pick up on the joke, too. R17 responds “LOL I’m going with the sex theory since [R9] didn’t,” proceeding to make several jokes based on double entendre of the word “balls,” concluding “Oh Jesus I can’t write any more nonsense.” R9 responds “Oh no, no, you could push it further into ridiculousness,” continuing to sketch out the interpretive possibilities of “balls.” This exchange, while light-hearted, dramatizes the issues the thread consistently explores. And, like the best satire, the exchange actually shows the high degree of awareness the participants have of the conventions of analysis and interpretation. A mocking over analysis becomes a

showcase for the rich variety of interpretive approaches available in the study of art. In losing the pretense of “serious” analysis, the exchange actually makes participants comfortable to take interpretive leaps and strengthen their bonds of community.

By the end of FT1 OP has nuanced their thinking and the twists and turns of the thread help revise their initial thesis. The closing statement is much more intellectually useful than the initial worry: “I don’t like attributing intent to other people, especially creatively. I agree that interpretation is crucial, but believe we must own it as ours and not the creator of the piece’s.” From an initial position rooted in an anxiety about individual interpretation infringing on the authority of the author, revised through a sustained discussion of interpretation as opposed to the recovery of intention, OP concludes by recognizing the integrity of interpretation as an individual act and the importance of contextual understanding to the process of building good-faith analyses. Threads like FT1 balance the asynchronous tension of the online forum with the sustained engagement expected of the humanities seminar. Discussion forums in MOOCs like “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” are numerically significant with respect to scale, to be sure, but they are also rich sites for exploring both questions of method with respect to the interpretation of art and the way in which learners frame their relationship to institutions that have historically mediated access to it. When that art is comics, the tensions between interpretation and enjoyment are particularly acute.

Case Study #2

The participants in FT1 struggle with interpretation, taking cover in a reclaimed space of artistic and authorial intention. Put under scrutiny, though, their exchanges reveal the much more

complicated question of how knowledge and interpretive authority are represented in the public space of the forum. Ultimately the thread is about the consolidation and dispersal of agency involved in acts of interpretation, juxtaposing interpretation from the perspectives of aesthetics and identity politics. The next forum thread I will explore, Forum Thread 2 (hereafter “FT2”) from the second session of “Comic Books and Graphic Novels,” exacerbates the tension between aesthetic appreciation and the impact of forms of representation on readers and cultures. In confronting the misogyny that has historically fueled the comics industry and the forms of representation it tacitly and openly enforces, this thread reproduces the conflicts that have emerged in the humanities since the expansion of the textual canon in the 1980s and 1990s, rooted in locating a voice of authority and merging intellectual knowledge production with affective and more local expressions of knowing. Absent moderation by instructional staff, the thread self-regulates, relying on the internal energy of its participants. This energy is an expression of the capacity of digital learning environments to extend the production of knowledge outward into a nodal network of bodies. As FT2 shows, physical presence is not the only way to build a community of knowledge and support that engage participants both intellectually and emotionally.

In FT2, the dispersal of bodies yields a paradoxical consolidation. This consolidation builds an empowered community of learners who support each other intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Thread participants increase their knowledge of comics with respect to the form’s representations of sex, gender, and identity. But more importantly, in this thread users assert *themselves* in active discussion, rendering the act constituent of a peer community outside of the refereeing influence of instructional authority. Participants utilize the features of the platform, most significantly the up- and down-voting function, to signal developing discourse expectations

and a growing sense of community formation. The thread builds a self-regulating learning environment that privileges reasoned discussion rooted in evidence and relevant personal experience and demotes anecdotalism and sarcastic dismissal. Essentially, the thread builds for itself an educational environment responsive to the changing needs of the community and the changing conditions of access to knowledge and resources exemplified by the platform that hosts it. FT2 showcases the capacity for technological mediation to facilitate authentic educational encounters.

The opening question of the thread mimics the cadence of a seminar discussion prompt, taking the form of a proposition and an invitation to agree or disagree. OP writes:

One of the topics I am most interested in is the way women are portrayed in comics and graphic novels. Whether it's the illustrations of nearly bare-breasted women with impossible proportions in ridiculous positions, and/or the dumbed-down, cold hearted bitches in the works of writers like Frank Miller, or the helpless victims of crime or injury who need rescuing by a male hero, the portrayals of women have largely been misogynistic. Do you agree or disagree with this perspective? Can you give examples of comics that are, or are not, misogynistic?

This post establishes a topic, provides a range of examples of the topic, and presents a position in the form of a thesis. It is academic in tone, and responsive to the content of the course by finding a gap and bringing it to the community for discussion. It resists the tendency toward self-defense and the “echo-chamber” effect that often enter forum discussions by actively inviting other participants, in the absence of any recognizable pre-existing audience, into the discussion space. OP sent this question into the void with no guarantee that it would be picked up by other course

participants. This shows a confidence that MOOC discussion forums are, contrary to their characterization by critics, sites of potentially profound engagement and participation.

The first exchange of the thread responds to OP's original proposition by expanding the scope of the question from the specific case of comics to broader issues of representation. R1 begins the discussion by connecting the misogynistic portrayal of women in comics to patterns in the long history of literature and the arts: "That is true for many comics aimed mainly at men, but the same could be said about literary works and the way women had been portrayed [sic] by writers in the history of literature." This claim not only broadens the scope of the discussion about comics, but it opens the conversation to systems rather than just case studies or examples. R2, a "a women's studies scholar and university teacher," joins the conversation, offering examples of comics and cartoons that exhibit "new gender-based experiments in comic/graphic art" which "intervene meaningfully in the debates that you are trying to raise here." The thesis, initially a proposition that the representation of women in comics has "largely been misogynistic" expands quickly to involve the capacities of art and comics to engage in "gender-based experiments." The thread begins within the discourse environment of the academy, but as it progresses, it leverages that authority into the formation of a community of knowledge that extends beyond the academic and into the personal and communal.

The second exchange highlights the hybridity of discussion common to these forums, part academic interpretation and part personal experience. R6 responds to OP by claiming that "comic art by it's [sic] nature is often unrealistic, and that applies to the male characters and their absurdly muscular figures as well. I think it's characterisation that gives away sexism rather than art." OP and R7 resist this distinction, claiming that the experience of comic art, down to cardboard displays at their local comic shops, is unavoidable and the surface representation is

what keeps some women away. R2 again relies on academic discourse, arguing that in order for more women to enjoy comics, “comic art needs to evolve and the writers and artists educated in gender and made aware of how terribly patriarchal and objectifying their representations of women are.” The final post of the exchange, by R8, synthesizes the tension in these arguments by telling a personal story about sexualization and comic books: “The thing about the males being just as unrealistic as the females is that the portrayal is very different...When I was young I was far more sexually mature than other girls my age and the portrayal of women did not disturb me...But even as the women in the comics I read were objects of sexual desire, they were still strong and equal rivals to their male counterparts.” R8’s intimate personal history informs their interpretive experience with respect to the portrayal and sexualization of comic book characters. The exchange’s blending of confessional and academic discourse is made possible, in part, by physical distance, which contributes a sense of openness, lending the confidence to be honest, in a way that the bodily experiences of embarrassment or even shame might inhibit in the physical classroom. In this way, the technological mediation introduced as a part of the educational platform may add to the participants’ ability to facilitate honest and forthright engagement with the questions at hand.

The first and second exchanges establish two rhetorical positions. On the one hand, the systemic patterns of representation across comics and the broader world of literature and the arts; on the other, the individual registers of personal experience informing any given person’s engagement with those systems. In the fourth exchange in the thread, the hybridity between academic and personal discourse becomes acutely strained. The exchange addresses head on the ideological stakes of sex and gender representation in comics. More importantly, it demonstrates how discussion forum threads can become shared spaces of knowledge building and resource

sharing. The formation of communities of mutual analysis and support is driven by dialog and by the mechanisms of social media recognition (up- and down-voting). By creating networked connections across physical space, this exchange exploits technology to build virtually what its participants find lacking physically. Tension emerges between an argument for individual responsibility in encountering art, the “if you don’t like it, don’t buy it” defense, and the capacity for active interpretation to expose inequities and advocate for cultural change. In practice, the thread becomes a group of participants taking an interpretive stance in the tradition of cultural studies and feminism, and a single participant arguing against this position and becoming increasingly frustrated and defensive. In a sense, the community the thread builds strengthens as the lone dissenter digs deeper into their position. Though it is possible to lament that the thread could not bring its participants to consensus, the consolidation of knowledge and support around issues of representation in comics and the systemic cultural inequities to which it points demonstrates the capacity for online discussion forums to become sites not only for the generation of cultural knowledge but also for community action.

First, R12 responds to OP’s initial question about representation by pointing to the exaggeration to which all bodies in superhero comics are subjected: “Is the representation of men any more realistic than the representation of women in comics?...I think most of people realize Red Sonja is no more a realistic representation of a typical woman than Conan represents the typical man.” This is a reasonable position, and a valid question that might emerge if one were to pick up any given mainstream comic book in 2016. The question grows naturally out of casual personal observation. But the proposition lacks a sense of historical and cultural context, a point OP makes in a comment: “the term for the drastic under-representation of a group in art or literature is ‘symbolic annihilation.’ Symbolic annihilation can also encompass how members of

a group are represented as less than they are. If women are portrayed in simplistic ways, in limited roles, or as having limited value, while men are portrayed as active, heroic, adventurous, or as more fully-rounded individuals, that too, can be part of symbolic annihilation.” OP’s comment relies on academic discourse and convention, the application of theoretical principles to specific examples to illustrate something about the cultural work they perform, knowingly or unknowingly. “Symbolic annihilation” marks an intersection with the intellectual work of the academy, a hinge point that proves troubling in the thread’s discussion. The differential between the logic of the individual observation and the recognition of a systemic cultural issue sets the tone for the remainder of the exchange, and establishes the parameters through which the knowledge community forms.

The establishment of a binary between individual perception and systemic representation extends, for R12, to questions of “political correctness,” shorthand for dismissal of positions that are perceived to be critical of dominant ideological expressions. R12 responds to OP with “do comics have to try to be as PC as possible or should the industry act like an entertainment business and give us what we are willing to pay money for?” R12 retains the distinction between the individual and the system, highlighting the influence individuals have on the industry through their purchasing power. They create a choice: between social responsibility and the obligation to fair representation on the one hand, and pure economic drivers on the other. The implicit assumption is that the reason male and female bodies look the way they do in comics is because consumers continue to buy those comics. R12 furthers this argument by pointing out that “today, with the huge selection and easy access to any comic written anywhere in the world, there is [sic] multiple titles being produced which appeal to different ages, gender, and individual tastes. No one is forced to read a comic series that don’t like [sic].” This response reveals a disconnection

between the recognition of individual impact in the marketplace and the larger cultural dynamics of taste and the value they create. The individual can only exert so much pressure, and if inequities exist at each stage along the chain of production, they will continue to flow both upstream and downstream. But R12 endeavors to separate consumption and ideology, writing: “enjoy comics, that is there [sic] purpose, not to make us angry and feel like a victim.” With this comment, R12 triggers a turn in the conversation, toward a consolidation of community of knowledge and support in opposition to this claim.

Participants reject the divestment of consumption from systemic representation by acknowledging the media ecology in which comics are produced. R13 joins the conversation by claiming for media an influence in the real world: “comics are a form of media and therefore are subject to the same scrutiny that we apply to all forms of media, but they also have the same powers of influence that other forms of media have.” Readers cannot extract themselves from the world in which they live, and neither can the content of comics be relegated to an innocuous escapism. Later in the same post, R13 again writes “I think we can all agree that comics are fantasy, but while you may not need things to be ‘PC’ in order to have fun, the people who are very often excluded or painted in such limited and sexualised ways and do not have the diverse and rich representation that you enjoy might feel that a fantasy world that does not include them is not that much of a fantasy.” R13’s comment turns the thread, away from one-on-one argument over individual versus systemic representation to the formation of a knowledge community rooted in mutual support, rallying around their claim. R1 responds to R13, “your entry reflects all what came to my mind,” a brief comment that functions as both a marker of awareness that multiple agents are in the thread and reading posts (even if not actively commenting) and a

recognition that distinct participants are aligned in argument and interpretation and willing to support one another.

The comments of thread participants speak broadly to the characteristics of the MOOC discussion forums of which they are a part, and the relationships between participants they cultivate. R14 writes “for me personally, the point is not to do away with stereotypes or representations I don’t like, but to bring to the table new alternatives and a playful but deeply searching exploration of what both genres and mediums are capable of.” R14’s point is an important one. An interpretive community needs to seek opportunities and invitations, “a playful but deeply searching exploration,” into its objects of scrutiny. R14 argues that recognizing the dynamics of representation, especially in the context of sex, gender, and comic books, creates an inclusive environment that generates conversation rather than limiting it. This claim resists the anecdotalism of R12’s position, which privileges individuals at the expense of the systems in which they participate. When R12 claims, in response, “if you don’t like to look at drawings of human bodies in tight-fitting and colorful costumes, it is better to avoid superhero comics,” they are tacitly mistaking a genre for a medium. In this formulation, superhero comics stand in for all of comics, and thus if the representation of women in superhero comics offends you, comics are not for you. R14’s point resists this elision of genre and medium, opening a space for interpretation of the intersection between the two. This is the type of exchange that is supposed to happen in the seminar, but rarely does due to student anxiety over saying something, or interpreting something, that may offend classmates or raise the hackles of the instructor. In the open space of the MOOC, things can push a little harder.

By extension, blanket characterizations of MOOCs presume that the surface features of the genre delimit the capacities of the medium. Disparate participants separated in time and

physical space are reduced to a genre, and one defined by distance and alienation. But in reality these conditions are characteristics of a medium, one generative of a broad variety of interactions and encounters. The MOOC discussion forum is a site of both convergence and contest. On the one hand, the threads I have explored here earn their places in the tradition of the humanities seminar. On the other, they reject the physical restrictions of the institution, relying on a network of actors open and flexible in their pursuit of knowledge. These interactions point to two vying definitions of the online discussion forum: an exclusive and combative space, or an inclusive and generative one. R12's final remark in the thread reverts to a defensive sarcasm that manifests the growing frustration felt in their earlier posts: "Ok, good luck on your campaign to eliminate all gender differences and sexual attraction in the world, or at least in comic books." R12 is excluded from this knowledge community, which is not a desirable outcome from the stance of the humanities educator.³⁶ However the interpretive and communal gains made by the majority of thread participants point to the real presence of substantive encounters with art and culture facilitated by online learning environments. The moral of the thread is not that some voices drown out others, as so often is the case in online forums. The moral is that distance can produce a sense of immediacy and intimacy that lays the groundwork for positive learning outcomes.

The up- and down-voting feature of the discussion forum contributes to the production of knowledge and the consolidation of community as well. Voting balances the "like" feature prevalent on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter with a more substantive sense of

³⁶ It is worth noting, however, that R12 continues to actively participate in a few threads across the forums, posting a few dozen times after this particular exchange. Certainly not "superposter" behavior, but neither is it evidence for being pushed away from participation in the forums because of a disagreement in a single thread. R12's case demonstrates that user behavior in online educational environments can be fractured and compartmentalized in pursuit of a kind of customization. When R12 found a lack of expressive capacity in one thread, new threads were available for redirecting that energy. In this sense, R12 left pieces of themselves as they navigated the cultural spaces of the forums.

respect or recognition for the validity of any given post. Hiesun Cecilia Suhr notes that “although the digital environment is decentralized, the impulse to create hierarchy is still present, as rankings and ratings are commonplace.”³⁷ But the voting system here is not a means of quantification, not exactly a hierarchy, but rather a means of recognizing value and building community consensus. OP’s two responses to R12’s initial question received three and five up-votes, respectively. This suggests, despite the exchange only having two current participants, a community acceptance of the direction of OP’s argument across a period of time. As more participants join the conversation, more posts follow a line of argument that looks to systemic issues of underrepresentation and inappropriate representation of sex and gender in comics, and the voting system confirms community support (R1 and R13 earn seven and 13 up-votes for their first posts in the exchange). During this consolidation of community, R12’s posts and replies remain neutral, earning no votes. As R12’s replies turn toward a position of defense and ultimately of sarcastic dismissal, they begin to earn down-votes: four for “Ok, you can read comics for any purpose that suits you” and three for “Ok, good luck on your campaign to eliminate all gender differences and sexual attraction in the world, or at least in comic books.” That these last two comments earned down-votes suggests that the acceptable standards for valuable contribution reject the turn toward negativity and bitterness that a defensive position reveals. That more thoughtful posts buttressed by evidence earn the respect of the thread community demonstrates the capacity for large-scale open discussion forums to function as a self-regulating environment of knowledge production and dissemination.

³⁷ Hiesun Cecilia Suhr, “Introduction: Toward an Interdisciplinary Understanding of Online Evaluation of Creativity and the Arts,” in *Online Evaluation of Creativity and the Arts*, ed. Hiesun Cecilia Suhr (New York: Routledge, 2015), 7.

FT2 showcases the MOOC's ability to facilitate not only meaningful encounters between people and art but also the cultivation of substantive communities of knowledge and mutual support. The intimacy produced in the thread's interactions is amplified by the distance between its participants, facilitated by the features and characteristics of the platform and interface. Threads like FT1 and FT2 demonstrate a phenomenon of complex systems that John Holland calls "emergence," a way of expressing the fact that "the behavior of the overall system *cannot* be obtained by *summing* the behaviors of its constituent parts."³⁸ Only when we examine the interactions between the participants and the interface of participation, rather than each in isolation, do the benefits of digital learning environments like MOOCs emerge. The discussion forums I have explored here resist the characterization of coldness and impersonality due to distance. Rather, they prove that distance cultivates something even more important than presence: community.

The Anxiety of Replication

The intimate interpretive communities developed in the forums of "Comic Books and Graphic Novels" challenge the assumed value of physical presence in the classroom as it has been traditionally understood. In the following section, I reflect on the implications of my research into MOOC discussion forums by extending this dissertation's exploration of authenticity and artifice at the intersection of humanist knowledge production and technological mediation. As I show through the lineage of cultural studies and posthumanism, digital dispersal does not signal a dissolution of humanities education into mere replication. Rather, it provokes

³⁸ John H. Holland, *Emergence: From Chaos to Order* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, 1998), 122.

that tradition to recognize in its own legacy the broadening and deepening effects of technology, especially as that mediation relates to the perceived utility of physical presence. There is reason for excitement about MOOCs and what they represent for those invested in a humanities education inflected by posthumanist modes of collective organization and aggregation. If posthumanism is what Cary Wolfe posits, “not the triumphal surpassing or unmasking of something but an increase in the vigilance, responsibility, and humility that accompany living in a world so newly, and differently, inhabited,” then MOOCs are an opportunity to explore such “differently inhabited” worlds.³⁹ As the case studies above show, and as this section’s trace of the shift from impulses of capital and canon to emergent communities of inquiry will elaborate, MOOCs mark an important evolutionary step for humanism in the digital age.

Claims about shifts in media through which art is produced and disseminated apply to the relationship between the digital classroom and the physical model from which it emerges, particularly with respect to how the educational environment shapes and engages the learning subject. Anxiety about the tension between authenticity and artifice with respect to algorithmic presence evokes Walter Benjamin’s fear, expressed in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” that in losing “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be,” art and cultural expression loses its aura and thus the authenticity in which its power and capital reside.⁴⁰ But does digital reproduction suffer the same

³⁹ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 47.

⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1968), 222. With respect to writing, Roger Chartier argues that “electronic representation redefines the ‘materiality’ of the work by suppressing the physical tie between text and book.” For Chartier, “the entire system of perceiving and manipulating texts is overturned.” Roger Chartier, “From Mechanical Reproduction to Electronic Representation” in *Mapping Benjamin: The Work of Art in the Digital Age*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Michael Marrinan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 111.

degradation-by-reproduction as a result of its mediation? The digital proxy of the student is not a copy of the original in the mechanical sense. It is more a representation, an avatar that once immersed the digital environment generates itself anew in each of its various instances.⁴¹ The digital subject is not a perfect representation of the original, but lack of perfection is not the same as being imperfect. The avatar operates relationally, composing itself in each environment relative to the other actors in that particular network, challenging Benjamin's fear that when mass scale is involved, quality is reduced to being a function of quantity.⁴² Mechanical reproduction separates by copying: the original is succeeded by discrete copies of itself, losing definition in each act of reproduction. Digital reproduction extends by embedding: the subject becomes a network of connections between each new manifestation across digital space and time. But for some, the same fear of loss inflects both – just as art reproduced mechanically loses its aura of originality, its rootedness in time and space, so the fractured and dispersed online learner erodes the solidity of value traditionally located in the individual thinking subject. Furthermore, such erosion of value in the individual maps to an erosion of value in the institutions historically tasked with forming them. In the digital-age, educators must expand the parameters within which they understand presence and engagement.

The online learner (tucked away at home, far from the physical classroom) challenges the consolidation of capital that has historically been the role of the physical imprint of institutions of higher education. This is a point Pierre Bourdieu makes directly in *Distinction*. Family and

⁴¹ Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska argue that in an age of unprecedented interlocking of technical and biological processes, “life itself under certain circumstances becomes articulated as a medium that is subject to the same mechanisms of reproduction, transformation, flattening, and patenting that other media forms...underwent previously.” Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), xiii.

⁴² Benjamin, “The Work of Art,” 241.

school converge in a process of “cultural inheritance” evident in each instance of material inheritance.⁴³ Like family heirlooms, which “bear material witness to the age and continuity of the lineage” as well as “contribute in a practical way to its spiritual reproduction, that is, to transmitting the values, virtues and competences which are the basis of legitimate membership in bourgeois dynasties,” the rituals and procedures of university culture build value across time.⁴⁴ Bourdieu recognizes educational institutions as funnels through which to publicly reinforce and reproduce distinctions of taste, and determinations of high and low, that silently influence family lineage and social status. Even as American higher education has historically been a facilitator for social mobility, the practices cherished by humanities educators have been marked by these legacies of value and prestige. By exposing the dynamics of cultural capital that shape our perceptions of value in higher education, MOOCs drive the historical legacy of humanist inquiry in the digital age, dispersing it across a nodal network of knowers instead of consolidating it in a teacher-student binary. The MOOC is a return to the core motivating inquiry of the humanities, a hitherto unrecognized extension of the forms of mediation employed historically to perform it.

The cultural inheritance of the school, or, the way that colleges and universities express their relationship to shifts in culture and society, manifests in the interaction between students and teachers in the classroom: sometimes as resistance, sometimes as alignment, and sometimes as advancement. In the humanities, the emergence of cultural studies and multiculturalism across the 1970s and 1980s highlights the relationship between culture and school. John Hartley argues that these scholarly stances explored “a wider array of practices than had hitherto been canonized in the literary tradition, by introducing popular culture and everyday life into an analytical

⁴³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984, 2010), 69.

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 69.

system that had been designed to form aesthetic and moral judgments about elite arts.”⁴⁵ Such assertions triggered debates over the integrity of aesthetic value in a material world, and the academy struggled to reconcile the enduring legacy of the past and the urgent pressures of the present. As Rita Felski puts it, cultural studies “did not seek to destroy aesthetics, but to broaden the definition of what counted as art by taking popular culture seriously.”⁴⁶ This broader definition led to a weakening of the distinctions between high and low. John Frow, in 1995, claimed that “there is no longer a stable hierarchy of value (even an inverted one) running from ‘high’ to ‘low’ culture,” and that those categories “can no longer, if they ever could, by neatly correlated with a hierarchy of social classes.”⁴⁷ Thus, in synthesizing elite and popular art in a single scholarly practice, and in highlighting the weakening of hierarchies between the two, cultural studies exposed a central principle, crystallized by Barbara Herrnstein Smith: “all value is radically contingent, being neither a fixed attribute, an inherent quality, or an objective property of things but, rather, an effect of multiple, continuously changing, and continuously interacting variables or, to put it another way, the product of the dynamics of a system.”⁴⁸ Smith’s claim erodes the unilateral authority of the academy to make judgments of taste and value. But these claims to contingency did not easily filter into the practices of teaching and learning deployed in university classrooms.

The field of cultural studies reframed scholarly work and opened up the humanities classroom to a broader spectrum of cultural products and voices than ever before. And yet the classroom practices used to expose students to these new works, and modes of

⁴⁵ Hartley, *Digital Futures*, 34.

⁴⁶ Rita Felski, “The Role of Aesthetics in Cultural Studies,” *The Aesthetics of Cultural Studies*, ed. Michael Bérubé (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 32.

⁴⁷ John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

⁴⁸ Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value: Alternative Perspectives for Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 30.

acknowledgement, engagement, and assessment, remain slow to respond. The influx of popular material into the traditional reading lists of humanities courses did not translate into a corresponding evolution of the pedagogical practices used to analyze and interpret it. As John Guillory argues, “when teachers believe they have in some way challenged or overthrown the canon and its evaluative principles, what they have always really done is devise or revise a particular syllabus.”⁴⁹ The syllabus, in Guillory’s argument, is the expression of canon itself. Guillory’s claim is useful in recognizing the cultural dynamics of capital produced by the choices of educators. It pulls the transcendence of Western tradition down into the material networks of teachers and learner in the school. But in focusing exclusively on the stakes of the reading list, Guillory only addresses one half of a typical syllabus. The other half, the assignments, activities, assessments, and grading policies that functionally predicate a course, are equally worthy of our scrutiny. More than that, worthy are the ongoing peer-to-peer interactions impossible to anticipate on the syllabus. What education innovation has done, especially what MOOCs have done, is to confront humanities educators long satisfied with their expanded reading lists with what has not really changed at all, the ways that they interact with and evaluate students. MOOCs call into question the canons of practice that shape our classrooms. Those canons of practice in turn shape teachers, learners, and institutions. As interface and platform become increasingly important in executing those practices, those shapes change.

The question cultural studies posed to the textual canon shifted the *content* of humanities education. But to understand the conditions needed to change the *practices* of humanities education, from individual to community, I turn to the domain of posthumanism. The extension of knowledge practices and bodies (human and otherwise) into networks is an expression of

⁴⁹ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 30.

posthuman learning, which, for N. Katherine Hayles, involves recognizing how “discursive formations based on pattern and randomness jostle and compete with formations based on presence and absence.”⁵⁰ What Hayles calls an “epistemic shift” toward “dematerialization” has reframed the thinking body in digital terms, dependent on bits and their organization into flows.⁵¹ Traditional learning models that rely on the consolidation of knowledge in the instructor and transmission to the learner in the controlled environment of the classroom have long claimed exclusive purchase on the institutions of higher education. For Hayles, the posthuman offers “resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines” not with the intent of erasing the former in favor of the latter, but as a way of committing to “embodied actuality” rather than mere “disembodied information.”⁵² Large-scale MOOCs and the discussion forums they house call our attention to the posthuman tensions Hayles explores. As a platform for interaction, online discussion forums are predicated upon the active presence of each participant to keep the discussion alive, a give and take between discrete users. But participants can be actively engaged in several discussion threads at once, essentially being both present and absent from each simultaneously. The balance of presence and absence draws the learner down into various networked communities, an expression of the extension-via-embedding described above. The commitment to isolated attention that the classroom invites (or, perhaps, tries to enforce) is a legacy rooted in the sense of individuality of discrete learning subjects. It is a modern logic, not particularly well suited for explaining the digital-age dynamics of meaningful educational exchange online let alone for explaining the lineage of technological mediation in the knowledge-production practices of the liberal arts.

⁵⁰ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 28.

⁵¹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 39.

⁵² *Ibid*, 287.

Teaching and learning online is defined by participation in responsive communities that operate as living networks rather than the modification of discrete individuals. I ground this line of thinking in the work of Rosi Braidotti, whose *The Posthuman* claims that “posthuman knowledge – and the knowing subjects that sustain it – enacts a fundamental aspiration to principles of community bonding.”⁵³ For Braidotti, posthumanism challenges the mode of intellectual history, crystallized in Immanuel Kant’s 1784 essay *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (“Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”), that the preservation of individual autonomy leading to personal growth and development will also lead to the growth and development of human civilization. As Kant writes, “if only freedom is granted, enlightenment is almost sure to follow.”⁵⁴ This trickle-down enlightenment has led to the university’s role as both incubator and catalyst. But as with economics, the trickle-down model works better in theory than it does in practice. In the educational sphere, it relies on a paradox: the self-motivation and self-determination of learners in environments of comprehensive instructional control and assessment. Because of the great number of societal, political, and economic constraints on that empowerment, the trickle never reaches its destination. The modern theoretical humanities have been shaped in large part by a reaction to claims like Kant’s, which Braidotti locates explicitly in the “anti-humanism” of Michel Foucault.⁵⁵ Braidotti’s “principles

⁵³ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 11.

⁵⁴ Immanuel Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?,” in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals and What is Enlightenment?*, trans. Lewis White Beck, The Library of Liberal Arts Series (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1959), 86.

⁵⁵ Braidotti grounds her systems-thinking in the Foucault’s philosophy of power. Foucault’s interrogation of Kant, in a short essay also titled “What is Enlightenment?,” “problematizes man’s relationship to the present, man’s historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject.” Foucault locates the drive of historical change not in the mental works of individuals but in the systems of power and control that collude to define and control them. Michel Foucault, “What Is Enlightenment?,” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 42. For Braidotti, “anti-humanism consists in de-linking the

of community bonding” do a better job of explaining how learning is transacted across digital interfaces and online environments than the logic of the individual development of the discrete thinking subject, a kind of “counternarrative” to the dominant rhetoric of humanism flowing from the Enlightenment.⁵⁶ For Lankshear, Peters, and Knobel, while cyberspace “calls into question the stability and coherence of the book and forms of narration enacted upon it,” it equally “calls precisely these same features into question in relation to the subject.”⁵⁷ Education innovations like MOOCs expose the layers of technological mediation that have always conditioned the production, organization, and dissemination of knowledge through networks of people and the things they use to communicate ideas through time.

Posthuman knowledge describes the discussion forums of MOOCs when those spaces afford learners the opportunity to build a model of inquiry collaboratively, to speak and understand their experience in community, and to carve their own relationships between presence and absence, between consolidation and dispersal. MOOCs confront educators and learners with these concerns of posthuman thinking. In Braidotti’s terms, posthuman knowledge networks represent “the idea of subjectivity as an assemblage” which implies first “that subjectivity is not the exclusive prerogative of anthropos; secondly, that it is not linked to transcendental reason; thirdly, that it is unhinged from the dialectics of recognition; and lastly,

human agent from [Kant’s] universalistic posture, calling him to task, so to speak, on the concrete actions he is enacting. Different and sharper power relations emerge, once this formerly dominant subject is freed from his delusions of grandeur and is no longer allegedly in charge of historical progress.” Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 23.

⁵⁶ Counternarratives “function generically as a critique of the modernist predilection for ‘grand,’ ‘master,’ and ‘meta’ narratives. These take issue with the narratives which have come down to us as part of the culture of the Enlightenment” AND “counter not merely (or even necessarily) the *grand* narratives, but also (or instead) the ‘official’ and ‘hegemonic’ narratives of everyday life.” Michael Peters and Colin Lankshear, “Postmodern Counternarratives,” in *Counternarratives: Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogies in Postmodern Spaces*, ed. Henry Giroux, Colin Lankshear, Peter McLaren, and Michael Peters (New York: Routledge, 1996), 2.

⁵⁷ Lankshear, Peters, Knobel, “Critical Pedagogy and Cyberspace,” 161.

that it is based on the immanence of relations.”⁵⁸ The four challenges to subjectivity Braidotti posits here are manifested variously in the MOOC project. The first two express a relationship between learner and machine: at the interface of the screen, the causal pathways of knowledge creation and dissemination become intertwined and indistinct. No longer is the network merely a conduit from one thinking subject to another. Rather, the network and the devices we use to access it (and their modes of algorithmic aggregation and organization) become knowledge producers themselves, in conjunction with human actors. The second two challenges appear contradictory on the surface: recognition would seem to be the predicate for the “immanence” of any relations the environment might house. But MOOCs take steps to decenter recognition, shifting away from the location of individual bodies and moving toward collective constellations. What is present is the relation between actors, rather than the actors themselves. Posthuman knowledge networks alleviate Benjamin’s anxiety of reproduction that began this section. Reading online educational environments through this lineage reframes the conditions of learning online from the consolidation of knowledge in the individual subject to the collective generation of meaning through encounters with art and culture mediated by technology.

Big MOOCs like “Comic Books and Graphic Novels” expose intersections of legacy, capital, and algorithm. They actualize the knowledge networks the posthumanists theorize, but imperfectly (indebted as they are to the neoliberal orbit of Silicon Valley and the corporatization of the university). Acknowledging continuity between the humanist subject and its algorithmic representations lays the groundwork for meaningful and responsible online learning in the digital age. Posthuman knowledge, in the formulation provided by Hayles and for Braidotti, “marks the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism and traces a different discursive

⁵⁸ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 82.

framework,” one that engages “an ethical bond of an altogether different sort from the self-interests of an individual subject.”⁵⁹ I have taken refuge in these formulations of presence-absence-immanence as a means of contextualizing the interface between learner and platform. But these formulations cannot and should not equal binaries between digital and analog, or between technology and tradition. Too often the rhetoric of disruption has, to generate change, capital, or both, circumscribed discussions of continuity relative to new environments of teaching and learning. Posthumanism’s commitments to ecosystem and node in thought, experience, and existence challenge the organizational logic of the university as much as the rhetorical strategies of disruption. This occurs on the level of the teacher-learner relationship as well as the relationship between administration, faculty, department, discipline, etc. At the same time, educational innovation initiatives, merely by virtue of their technological platforms, do not automatically share conceptual space with posthumanism.

Though education innovation in general and MOOCs in particular are rhetorically invested in the commitments of Silicon Valley and its visionary models of progress, their operations in practice are sometimes only incrementally distinct from convention and expectation when it comes to cultural capital. This is acutely felt in the relationships between MOOC platforms and the institutions that subscribe to them. As Jeremy Knox argues in a recent article for *Studies in the Philosophy of Education*, “at the very same time as claiming to disrupt exclusivity and inaccessibility by providing free admittance,” MOOCs use the “institutional facade” (literally in the sense of using a subscriber university building, complete with columns and ivy, as a header image on course pages) “to add prestige and authenticity to the MOOCs on

⁵⁹ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 37, 49.

offer.”⁶⁰ MOOCs leverage the cultural capital of the university system to anchor their value in space and time. While MOOCs operate in the cloud (at least from the perspective of the average user not accustomed to picturing server warehouses), they require a loan from the university in the form of mass and solidity, the physical prestige of the host university, to maintain respect. What is most useful about Knox’s formulation is that it highlights how subtle the relationship between symbolic and economic capital is in the world of education innovation. MOOCs have been publicly premised on the promise of new and unprecedented access, yet the educational experience of learners is largely “produced and conditioned by an underlying, humanist-informed subject | object dualism,” the very same dualism that has produced and conditioned the model of the university student, at least since the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶¹ It seems that MOOCs and their advocates, despite themselves, are subject to what Braidotti calls “the gravitational pull back to Humanism.”⁶² Knox critiques the manipulation of university prestige as a means of acknowledging how far MOOCs have to go before they make good on their posthuman commitments, before they can generate new concepts of meaningful technologically-infused learning experiences. If MOOCs continue to rely on the systems of university prestige generated by the perpetuation of education as a means of shaping individual subjects, their mandate of innovation remains subject to the scope of the platform’s Silicon Valley associations. Discussion forums, as I have studied them here, lend promise to the idea that teaching and learning in the digital age can find comfort in the pathways of nostalgia and also inspiration in the push toward progress.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Knox, “Posthumanism and the MOOC: opening the subject of digital education,” *Studies in the Philosophy of Education* 35 (2016): 311.

⁶¹ Knox, “Posthumanism and the MOOC,” 312.

⁶² Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 153.

The reality of technological change across time has influenced the way humanists manipulate objects, develop ideas, and generate meaning from their study. It has also altered the flow of educational curricula and the contents of university syllabi. But the fundamental structure of the ideal educational environment as it has been defined by prestigious and privileged institutions of higher learning – the play of mind and idea between teacher and student – has remained less responsive to change. The real disruptive potential of education innovation, then, is not its confrontation of tradition but its acknowledgement of a shared history of mediation in the lineage of knowledge-making practices in the liberal arts. If we accept Claire Howell Major’s proposition, that “when teaching online, technologies do not simply serve as functional instruments that can assist with instructional work,” they “mediate our realities and, in so doing, become part of them,” a more robust exploration of the interaction between educational environment, technological mediation, and learning engagement is needed.⁶³ This chapter, and indeed this dissertation overall, contribute to that work. I have traced continuity between the posthuman aggregative elements of MOOC discussion forums and the historical project of humanism. In this, I help MOOCs escape from the reductive trap of disruption. Humanism in the digital-age is experiencing a shift away from culture wars and canons toward communities of networked practice and inquiry. MOOCs are one important representation of that shift. Rather than simply a new and disruptive presence, I have positioned MOOCs and other vernacular technologies within the larger vectors of spirit and texture that have shaped the practices of higher learning throughout their long history.

At their best, discussion forums like those I have introduced in this chapter invite participants to humanize their digital environments by embedding their own experiences into the

⁶³ Claire Howell Major, *Teaching Online: A Guide to Theory, Research, and Practice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 9.

grammar of their interpretations. FT2 especially used comics as a conduit for sharing personal experience, and thus for the cultivation of acknowledgement and support. Lecture slides on comic books and graphic novels become the occasion for larger conversations that grow from interpretation to something that more closely resembles care. As participants share details of their lives, they offer solidarity – acts that build the community of the thread and strengthen the nodes of its network. These threads become bodies holding together shards and fragments of selves. In this way, they extend the logic of the early printed book and the comic book explored in this dissertation, expressing encounters between people, ideas, and things as relationships of metonymy in the long historical project of humanism. Far from the cold and impersonal spaces they are often thought to be, technological objects generate meaningful encounters between communities of learners and traditions of knowledge as both move through time. MOOCs help direct humanities education toward recognition of its own legacy in the digital age through the formation of participatory networks of learning. Reflecting on this evolution, and bringing that reflection into our teaching and learning, is the challenge of higher education in the digital age.

Again, this dissertation's roots in the study of comics and graphic novels is instructive, from the dual humanist lineage of transcendent continuity and material network to the role technological mediation plays in the production and dissemination of knowledge in the liberal arts. As Daniel Marrone writes, “comics give the reader every opportunity to master the narrative – to recall earlier moments, to re-collect disparate parts – and yet in their fragmented presentation they simultaneously demand constant repositioning in relation to the narrative.”⁶⁴ Such repositioning habituates readers toward the “juxtaposition of meaning” and “juxtaposition

⁶⁴ Daniel Marrone, *Forging the Past: Seth and the Art of Memory* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 119.

of temporal moments” that defines the form.⁶⁵ The programming languages and algorithms that constitute technological objects like printed books and online discussion forums act as repositories for the “re-collection” of memory, personal experience, and knowledge-making processes. In our contemporary moment, it is more important than ever to understand new media, as Nancy K. Baym does, by considering technological features and “personal, cultural, and historical presumptions and values those features evoke.”⁶⁶ Baym explores technology and humanity not as antagonists but as interlocking expressions of inquiry patterns across time. Likewise Richard Kern argues in *Language, Literacy, and Technology* for a revision in how scholars frame the relationship between technology and culture: “rather than viewing the technical and the social as mutually exclusive domains, then, we need to understand technology as part of what constitutes the social, and the social as part of what constitutes technology.”⁶⁷ “New media” are rarely new, as Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska point out, and should not elicit our fear.⁶⁸ Yet both fear and newness inform the narratives of nostalgia and progress I have elaborated in this dissertation, and both represent potential sites of convergence and contestation as they mature into constituent aspects of the rhetoric of crisis.

As higher learning struggles to recognize its past and envision its future in the digital age, the intersections of time and value made visible by technological mediation emerge as forms of continuity. But nostalgia and progress, and indeed the rhetoric of crisis they constitute, distort that continuity. Mark Greif writes in *The Age of the Crisis of Man* that “crisis curiously ends pragmatics: rather than testing and tweaking in experimentalist gradualism toward an ideal

⁶⁵ Marrone, *Forging the Past*, 177.

⁶⁶ Nancy K. Baym, *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 1, 22.

⁶⁷ Richard Kern, *Language, Literacy, and Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 79.

⁶⁸ Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), xiii.

hypothesis, one embraces permanent tragedy and intervenes violently.”⁶⁹ Crisis suspends dialogue; narratives of nostalgia and progress ignore shared histories. Across this dissertation, I have argued that objects as diverse as early-modern printed books, occasional lectures, comics and graphic novels, and MOOC discussion forums reveal the recursive movement from materiality to transcendence and back again that is built into the process of knowledge-making as it defines the enduring aspirations of higher learning. The layers of technological mediation I have pursued across this argument expose the interplay of people, ideas, the objects that contain them, and their relative cultural value through time. The logic of the book is grounded in media, in the convergence of spirit and texture that constitute it as much as the contestation of value that define its lineage. But such acknowledgement of mediation has too often been effaced in the history of higher learning. In resisting this, I have remained mindful of Northrop Frye’s words in *The Critical Path*: “the critic has to establish a pattern of continuity linking present culture with its heritage, and therefore with its inheritors, for a culture that is careless of its past has no defences against the future.”⁷⁰ I have learned the lesson of continuity thinkingly, resisting simple causal connections between people, ideas, and the objects that contain each in time. In this, I have tried not to be careless of higher education’s past that I might be more productive in envisioning what sort of defenses educators might need for its future.

From the college classroom to comic books, we live in an age in which the mediation between people and technology calls into question traditional pathways of cultural value, authenticity, and the ground of human knowledge. While it is easy to consider threatening any new form of mediation that challenges conventional wisdom about knowledge production and

⁶⁹ Mark Greif, *The Age of the Crisis of Man: Thought and Fiction in America 1933-1973* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), Kindle edition, loc. 961.

⁷⁰ Northrop Frye, *The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 100.

the value of presence, it is more productive to follow the lead of humanism as it has defined higher learning. Recognizing the capacity for both continuity and disruption in the charged space of the present recasts technological mediation as a mode of encounter rather than a momentary break. For Henry Jenkins, this shift is an expression of “convergence culture,” in which “consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” – a social and cultural negotiation rather than a purely technical one.⁷¹ For institutions of higher learning, the present expresses itself as a crisis when it allows the legacy of meaningful and reflective education to encounter technological innovation as an antagonist. By recovering a history of mediation in the logic of the book and reading its manipulations of time through vernacular media like comics and MOOCs, I have asserted continuity in place of disruption. Such a move allows exploration *through* crisis rather than inertia *in* crisis.

The historical project of humanism premises its continued relevance on intersections of time, technology, and capital. Tracing these intersections across the transcendent literary history of texts as well as within the material social networks through which we encounter them unlocks a continuity of inquiry that contains claims of crisis and disruption. In his book about the reality of time in the physical world *Time Reborn*, theoretical physicist Lee Smolin writes that “imagination is the organ the allows us to thrive on the cusp between danger and opportunity; it is an adaptation to the reality of time” – I have argued here that technology and its innovative forms of mediation drive the humanist imagination forward as it encounters both memory and change in time.⁷² It has always been the task of imaginative language and the books that mediate it to draw people and ideas through time in registers of spirit and texture, a task that has never

⁷¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 3.

⁷² Lee Smolin, *Time Reborn: From the Crisis in Physics to the Future of the Universe* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2013), 252.

been fully divorced from its technological and material means. I read through the logic of the book – as well as the contested boundary of the screen – to discover the shared lineage of technology as a shaping agent for the production and dissemination of knowledge. Recognizing the continuity of mediation in the history of higher education and the technologies upon which it relies can direct colleges and universities through the challenges of the digital age.

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APPENDIX A: FIGURES REFERENCED IN THE DISSERTATION

Figure 0.1: Robert Sikoryak, "Inferno Joe," from *RAW* 2, no. 1 (1989) pg. 58.

Figure 1.1: William Caxton, Prologue woodcut in *The Mirrour of the World*, ed. Prior.*Prologue.*

5

*After this foloweth the Recapitulacion of the thinges [*fo. 4]
 aforsaid capitulo xxiiii.
 Hier endeth the table of the Rubrices of this
 present book.

Prologue declaryng to whom this book apperteyneth.¹



FIG. 1.

Consideryng that wordes ben perisshyng, vayne & forgeteful, and wrytynges duelle & abide permanent, as I rede *Vox audita perit, littera scripta manet*, thise thinges haue caused that the faites and dedes of Annceyent menn ben sette by declaracion in fair and Aoured volumes, to thende that science and Artes lerned and founden of thinges passed myght be had in perpetuel memorye and remembraunce; ffor the hertes of nobles in eschewyng of ydlenes at suche tyme as they haue none other vertuose ocupacion² on hande ought texcersise them in redyng, studyng & visytyng the noble faytes and dedes of the sage and wysemen

¹ In the wood-cut reproduced here, a scroll, issuing from the magister's mouth, with the words "*audita pereunt, scripta manent*," has been inserted in ink. ² Caxton: *ocupacōn*; 2nd ed. *occupaciō*.

Figure 1.2: William Caxton's 1481 edition of *The Mirrour of the Word*, sig. a4^r, EEBO.

After this foloweth the Recapitulacion of the thinges
aforaid^d capitulo .xxiij.

Here endeth the table of the Rubriccs of this
present book.

Prologue declaryn^g to Whom this book apperteyneth



c Onsideryng
that wordes ben
perisschyng / wayne / &
forgeteful / And Writ-
tynges duelle & abi-
de permanet / as I rede
Voy audita perit li-
tera scripta manet /
These thinges haue
caused that the faytes

and^d wordes of Almyght men / ben sette by declaracion in
fair and^d Adurned^d volumes / to thence that science and
Artes lerned^d and^d founden of thinges passed^d myght be
had^d in perpetuel memorye and^d remembraunce / For the
hertes of nobles in escheyng of ydolenc at such tyme
as they haue none oth^r vertuose occupac^on on ha^de ought
teperseise them in redyng / studyng / & Visytyn^g the noble
faytes and^d wordes of the sage and Wysemen somtyme tra-
uaillyn^g in prouffyttable vertues / of Whom it happeth ofte
that somen ben enclyned^d to Visyte the bookes treatyn^g
of sciences particuler / And^d oth^r to rede & Visyte bookes
spekyng of faytes of armes / of loue / or of oth^r mettal:

Figure 2.1: Dante Aligheri, *Commedia*, folio 5^v of the *Codex Altonensis*, facsimile.



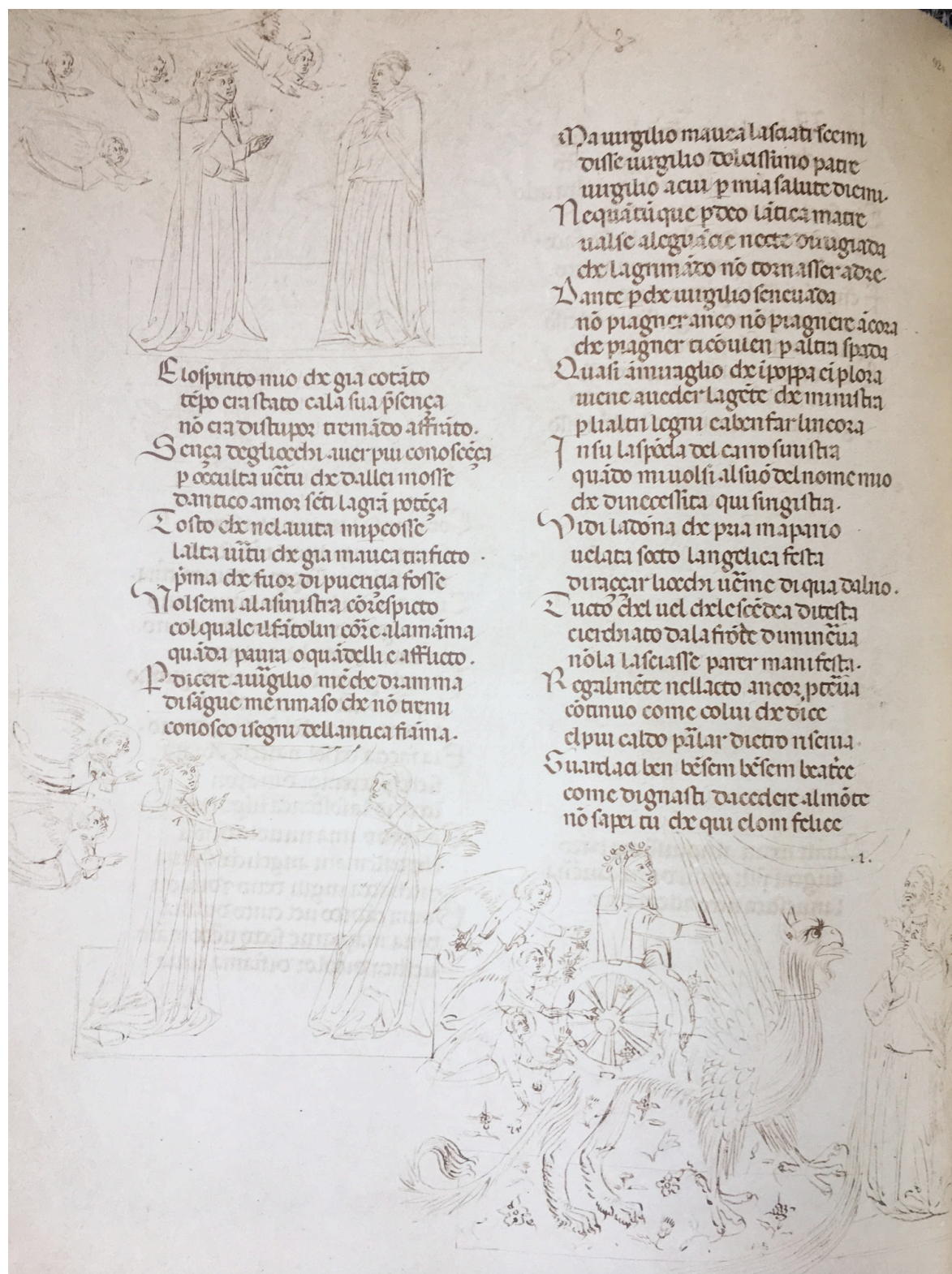
Figure 2.2: Dante Aligheri, *Commedia*, folio 92^v of the *Codex Altonensis*, facsimile.

Figure 2.3: William Caxton's 1485 edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, sig. iii^v, Rylands. (Note: book descriptions start toward the middle of the third line up from the bottom of the image)

Thenne to procede forth in this sayd book / whiche I
 directe vnto alle noble prynces / lordes and ladies /
 gentylmen or gentylwymmen that desyre to rede or here
 redde of the noble and ioyous hystorie of the grete conque-
 rour and excellent kyng .Kyng Arthur/ somtyme kyng of
 this noble royaume / thenne callyd brytayne / I wylliam
 Caxton symple persone present this book folowynge / whiche I
 haue enprynged & enprynted / And treateth of the noble actes / fe-
 ates of armes of chivalrye / promysse / hardynesse / humanyte
 loue / curtosye / and veray gentylnesse / wyth many wonder-
 ful hystories and aduentures / And for to vnderstonde bry-
 efly the contente of this volume / I haue deuyded it in to xvi
 bookes / and euery book chapytred as here after shal by god's
 grace folowe / The fyrst book shal treaten of the knyght
 dragon slayn the noble conquerour kyng Arthur and conty-
 neth xxviii chapytres / The second book treateth of Balyn

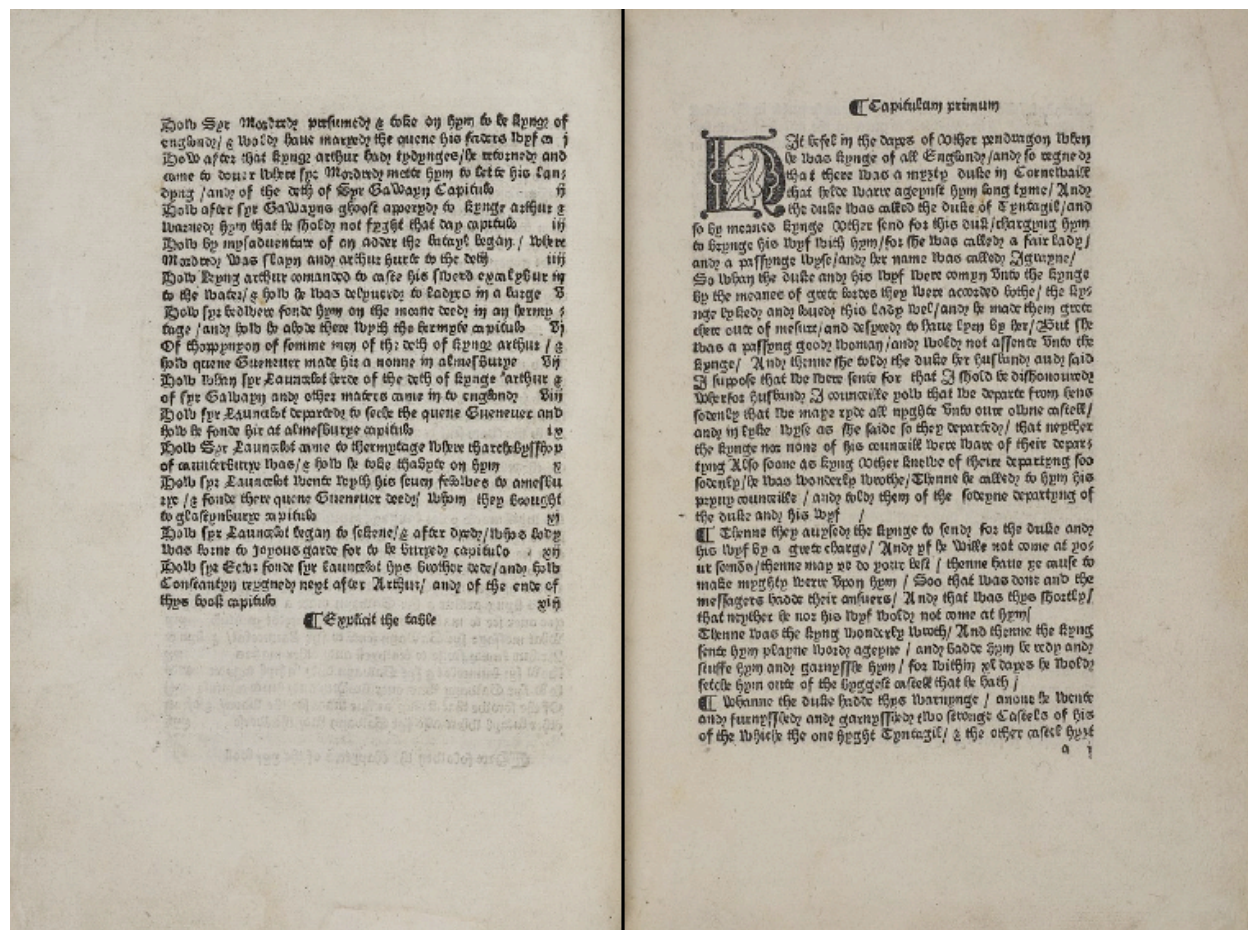
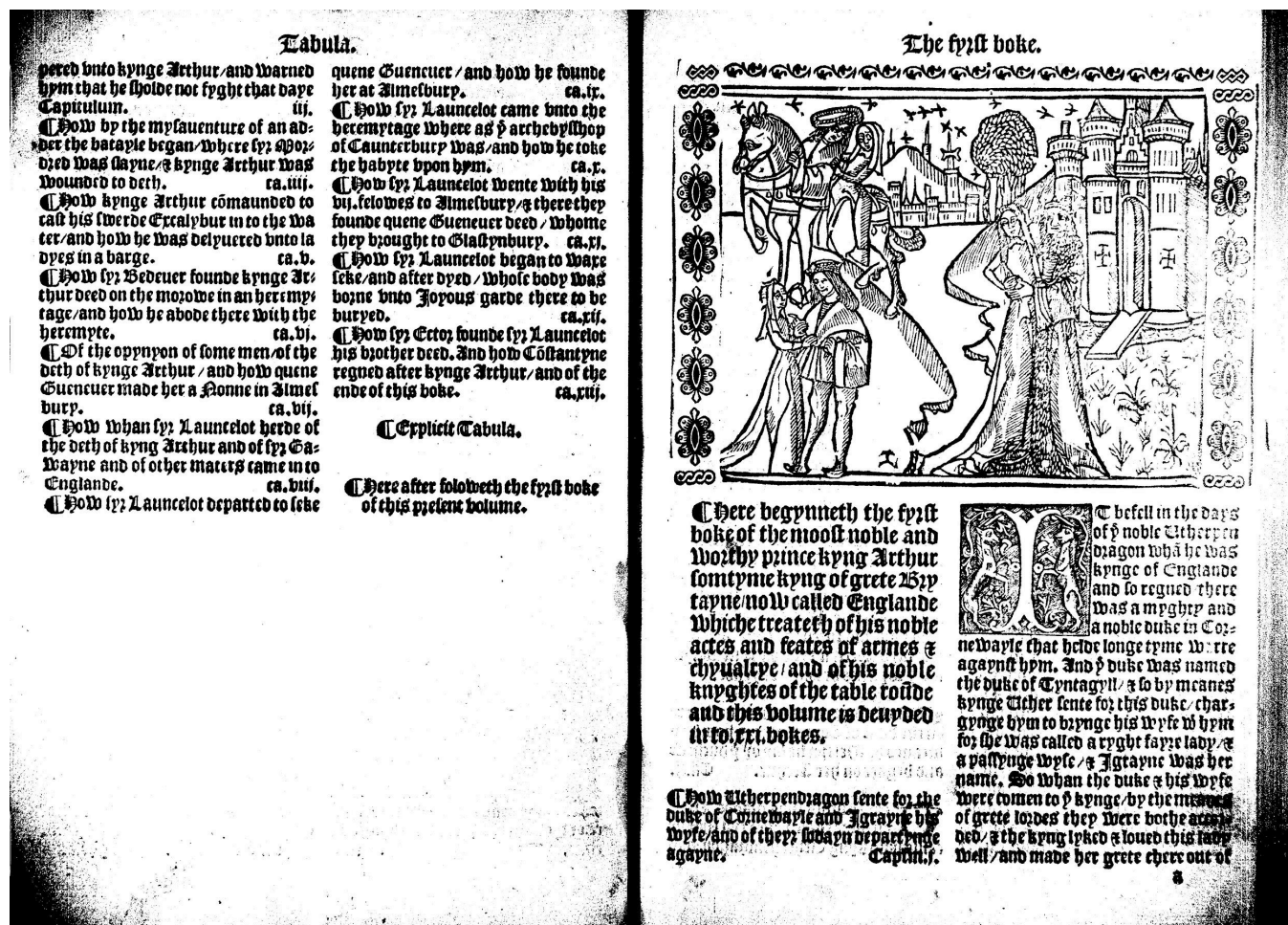
Figure 2.4: William Caxton's 1485 edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, sig. xiv^v-ai^r, Rylands.

Figure 2.5: William Caxton's 1485 edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, sig. eevi^r, Rylands. (colophon detail)

book of kynge Arthur & of his noble knyghtes of the rounde
table/that whan they were hole togydres there was euer an 'E
and' pl/and here is the ende of the deeth of Arthur /I praye
you all gentyl men and gentyl wymmen that redeth this booke
of Arthur and his knyghtes from the begynnyng to the en
dyng / praye for me whyle I am on lyue that god sende me
good deliuerance/ & whan I am deed I praye you all praye
for my soule/for this booke was ended the ix yere of the regne
of kynge edward the fourth/by syr Thomas Maleore knyght
as ihesu helpe hym for his grete myght/as he is the seruant
of ihesu bothe day and nyght /

Thus endeth this noble and ioyous booke entytled by moche
Darthur/Notwithstandyng it treateth of the byrth/lyf/and
actes of the sayd kynge Arthur/of his noble knyghtes of the
rounde table/there meruayllous enquestes and aduentures /
thachpuyng of the sangreal/ & in thende the dolorous deeth &
departyng out of this worlde of them al / which booke was re
dured is to englysshe by syr Thomas Malore knyght as afore
is sayd / and by me duged in to xvi bookes chapytred and
enprented / and fynysht in the Abbey Westmestre the last day
of Iul the yere of our lord / 41/CCCC/lyxxv /

Caxton me fieri fecit

Figure 2.6: Wynkyn de Worde's 1529 edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, sig. bbb8^v-ai^r, EEBO.

Figures 2.7 and 2.8: Printer's devices at the end of Wynkyn de Worde's 1498 *Le Morte*, Rylands (left) and 1529 *Le Morte d'Arthur*, EEBO (right)



Figures 2.9 and 2.10: Thomas Shelton, 1612 edition of *Don Quixote*, pg. 1, EEBO (left); John Stevens, 1705 edition of Avellaneda, pg. 1, EEBO (right).

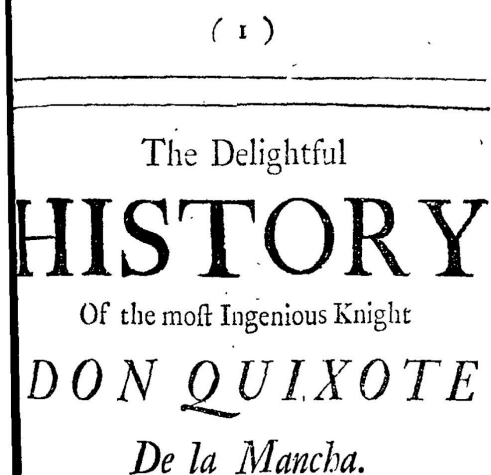
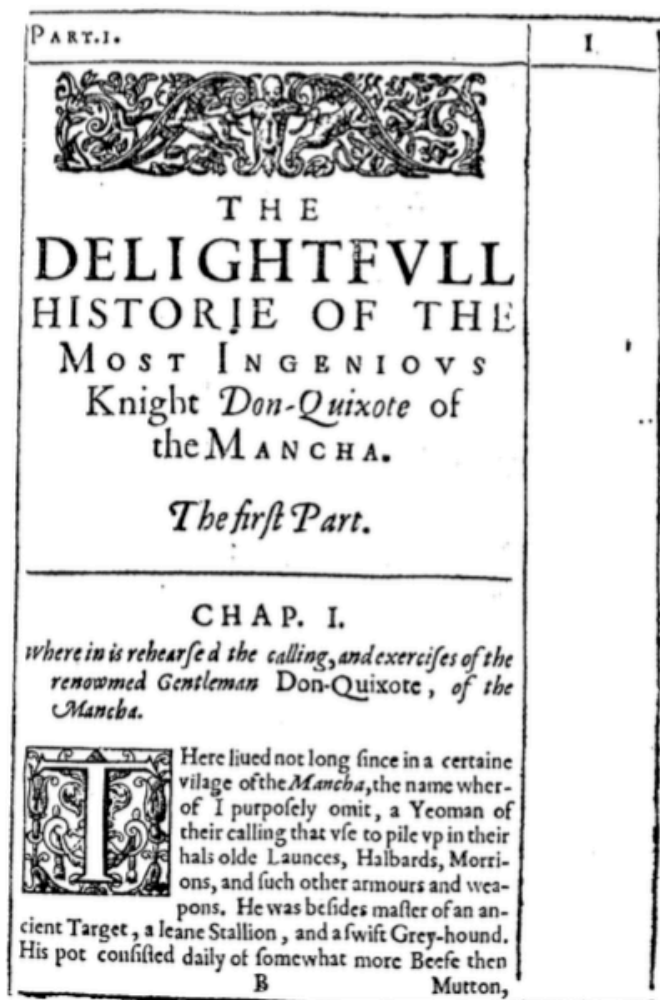


Figure 2.11: Stevens, 1705 Avellaneda, pg. 1, EEBO (detail of chapter heading and first lines)

C H A P I.

*Which mentions another Arabian besides Benengeli,
and treats of the Success of Don Quixote's Impri-
sonment in the Cage.*

THE Wise *Alifolan*, an Historian as faithful as *Benengeli*, gives an Account in his Memoires, that the *Moores*, from whom he descended, having been expell'd the Kingdom of *Aragon*, he accidentally found certain Annals writ in *Arabick*, and containing the Third of the Invincible Knight *Don Quixote de la Mancha* made from his Village of *Argamasilla*, to be present at the publick Tilting, to be perform'd soon after in the City *Zaragoza*. The Relation he gives us, is as follows.

Figure 3.1: *Ms. Marvel* (1977), Vol. 1 No. 1 (left); *Ms. Marvel* (2006), Vol. 2 No. 1 (middle); *Ms. Marvel* (2014), Vol. 3 No. 3 (right). Left and middle images are Danvers, right image is Khan.



Figure 3.2: G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona, *Ms. Marvel*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (2014), pg. 1.



Figure 3.3: Richard McGuire, “Here,” from *RAW* 2, no. 1 (1989), pg. 69.

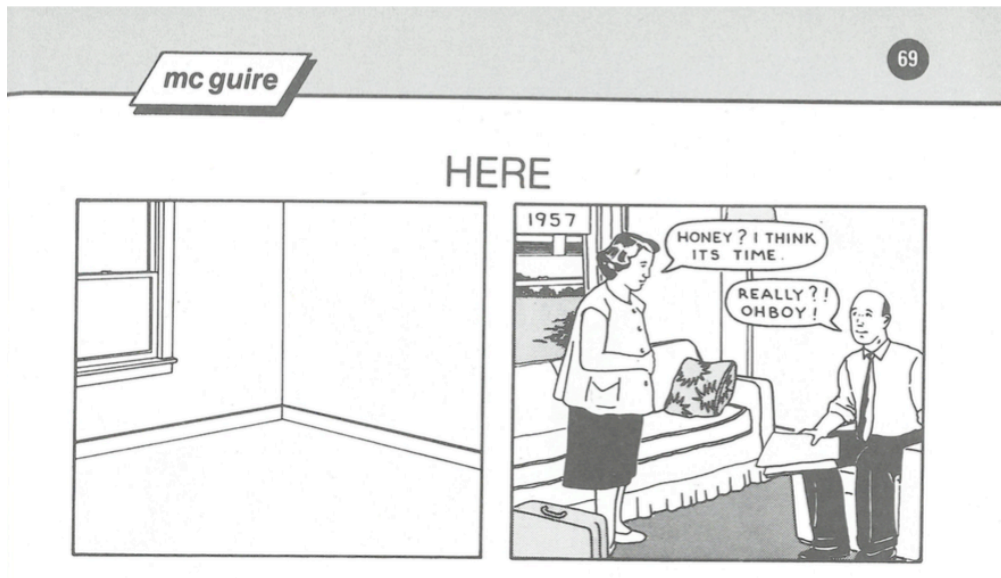


Figure 3.4: Richard McGuire, “Here,” from *RAW* 2, no. 1 (1989), pg. 72.

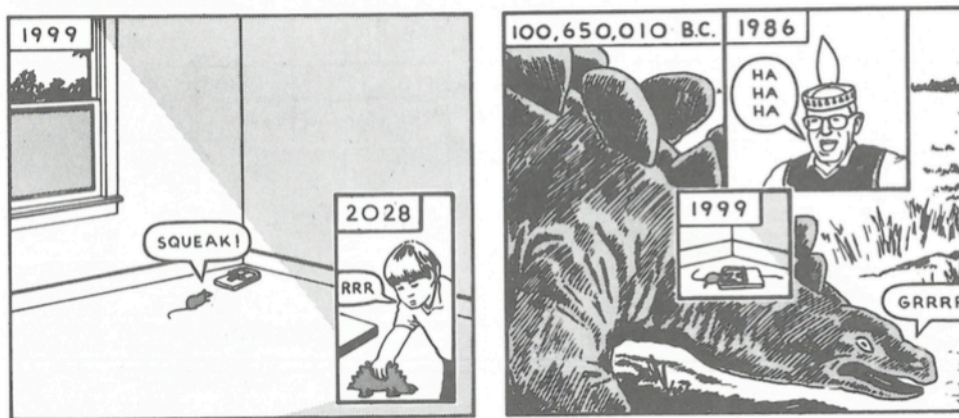


Figure 3.5: Richard McGuire, “Here,” from *RAW* 2, no. 1 (1989), pg 73.

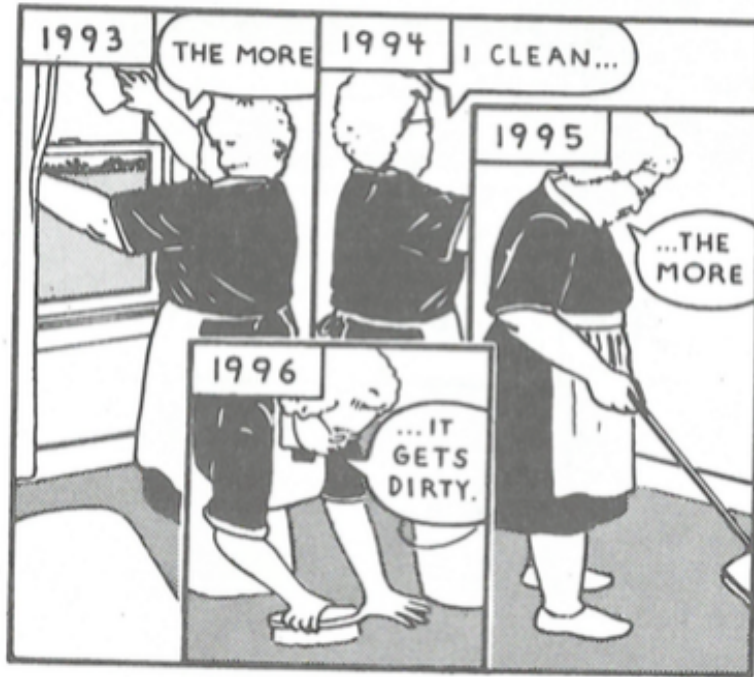


Figure 3.6: Richard McGuire, *Here* (2014).



Figure 3.7: Richard McGuire, *Here* (2014).



Figure 3.8: Chris Ware, components of *Building Stories* (2012), photo by author.



Figure 3.9: Chris Ware, back surface of the box containing *Building Stories* (2012).

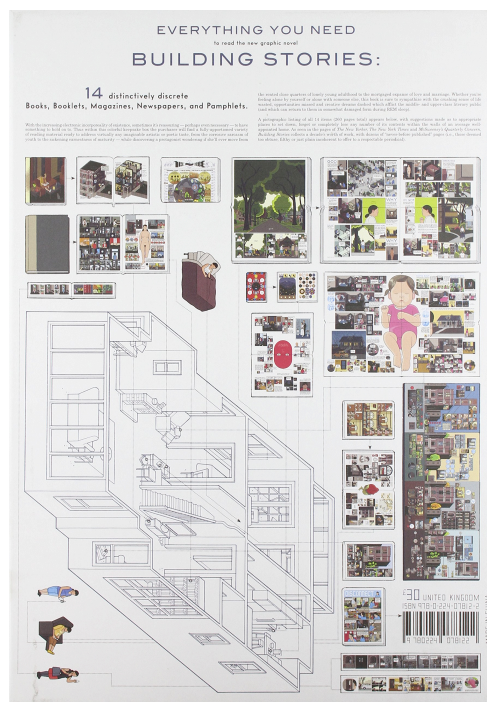


Figure 3.10: Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (2012), detail.

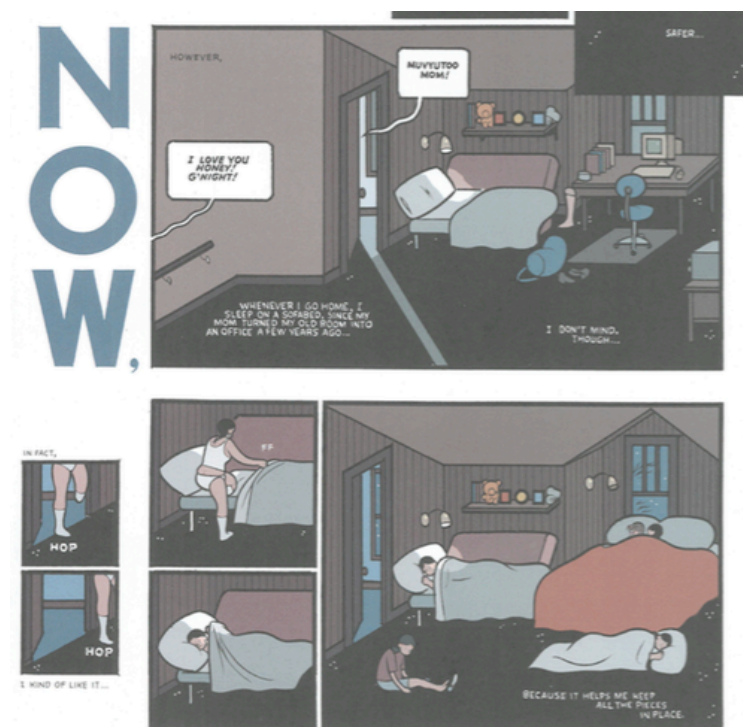


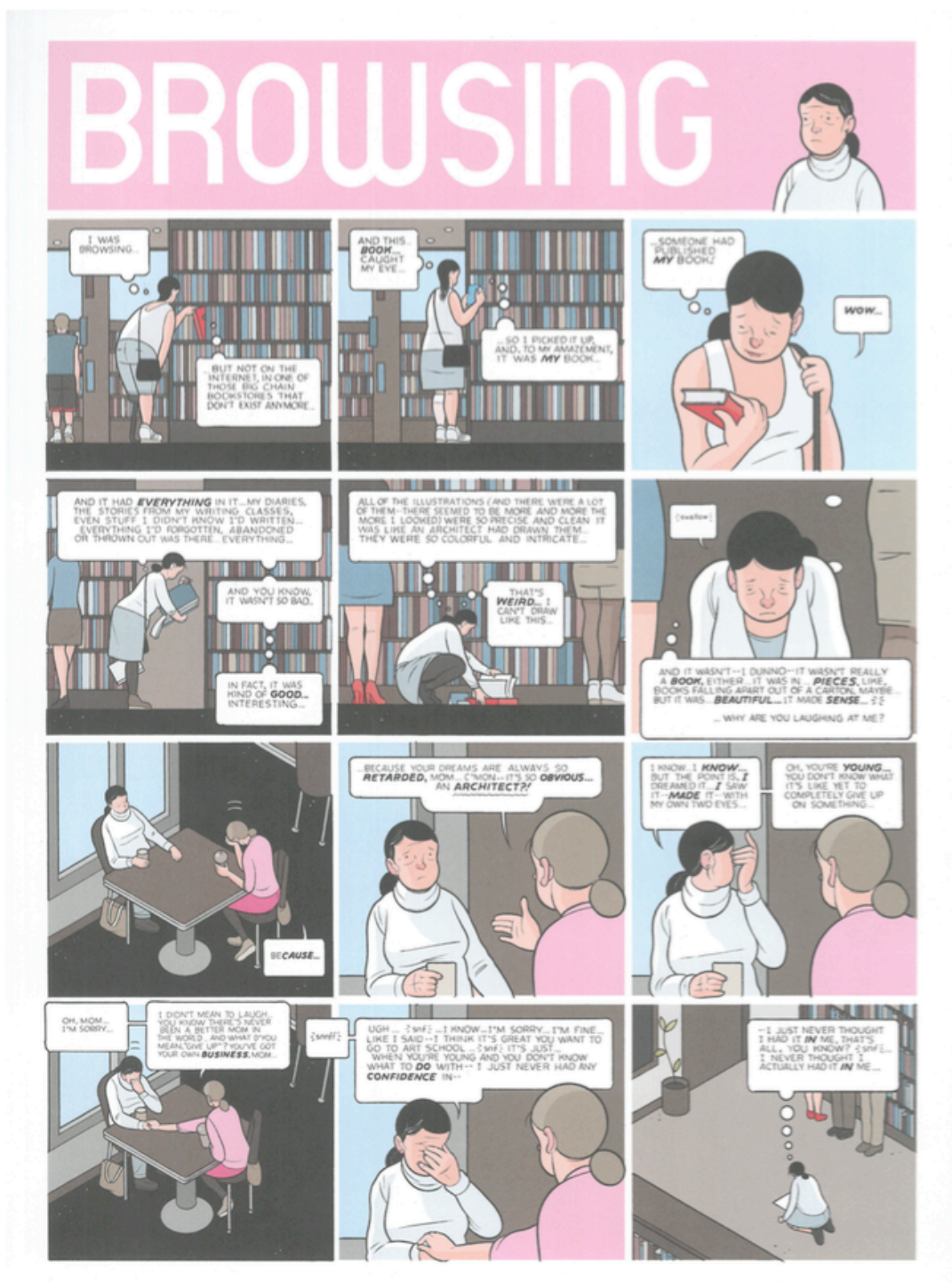
Figure 3.11: Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (2012), “Browsing.”

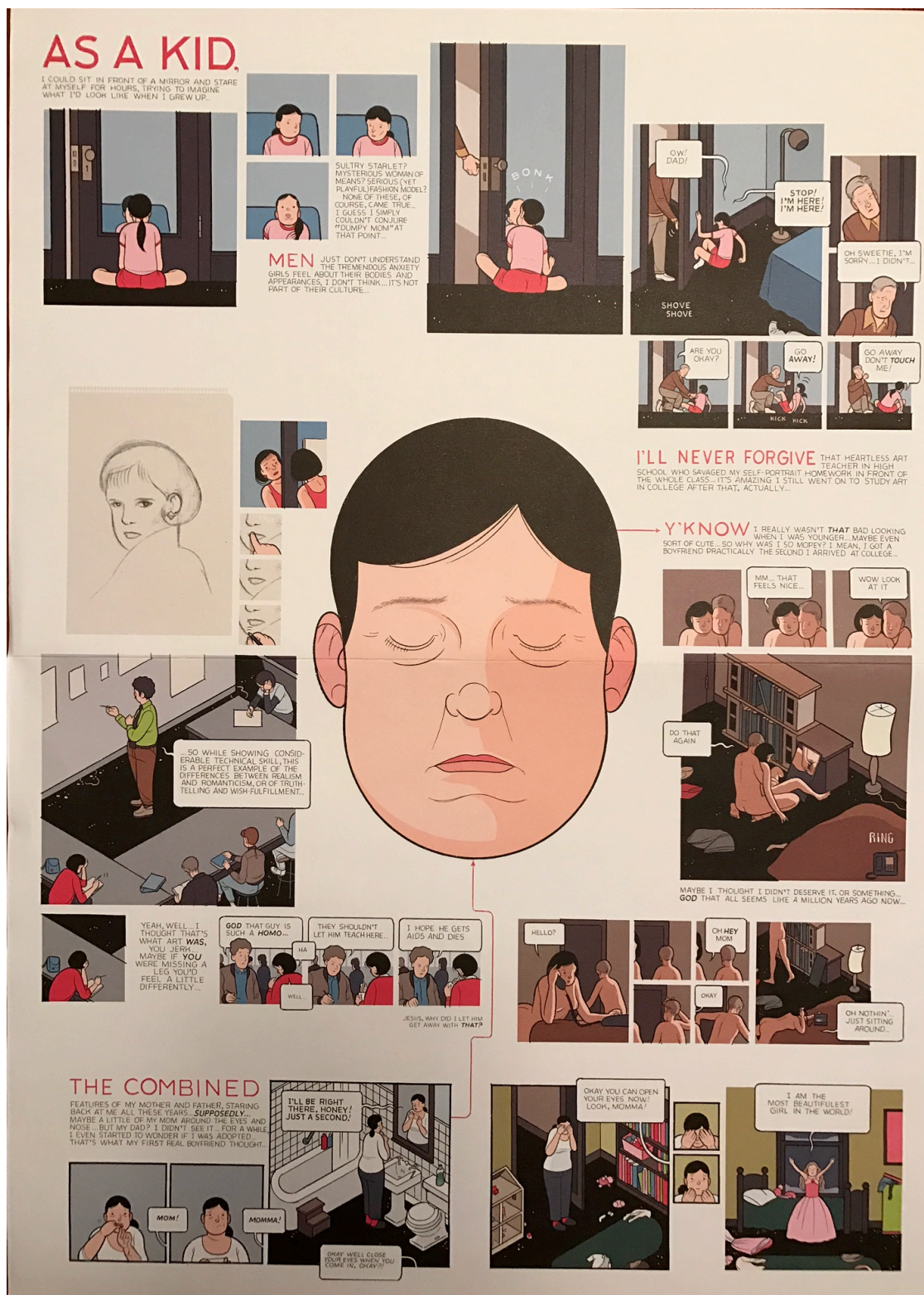
Figure 3.12: Chris Ware, *Building Stories* (2012), inside folio sheet.


Figure 3.13: Vaughan and Staples, *Saga* “Chapter One,” Vol. 1 no. 1 (2012), pg. 1.



Figure 3.14: Vaughan and Staples, *Saga* “Chapter One,” Vol. 1 no. 3 (2012), panel detail.




Figure 4.1: Post detail from “Forum Thread 1,” “Comic Books and Graphic Novels,” 2014.

Anonymous · 2 years ago 

Ok I think this is getting too serious. Let's play a game: Is it possible to overanalyse?



How about this:



- 1 - It symbolized that America is an over-strong country.
- 2 - It suggested that there could be some side effects of the super soldier serum.
- 3 - It introduced the possibility of a parallel earth where people have different bones.
- 4 - It showed that some artists may lack the knowledge about human anatomy.

Personally I found the third explanation most interesting :)

No offense. Just kidding.

 2  · flag