Laugh with us, not at us: parody and networked learning

Christine Sinclair

Centre for Research in Digital Education, Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh, Christine.Sinclair@ed.ac.uk

Abstract

In keeping with its theme, this paper has a light touch and a serious point. It arose from a concern that networked learning may not be recognisable enough to be parodied. Parody is a pervasive and ubiquitous cultural practice that entails imitation and laughter – features which could perhaps contribute to making networked learning knowable to a wider community. Despite parody's potential for serious damage, its broadest use supports the recognition, consolidation, development and renewal of a genre or movement. Drawing on Bakhtinian notions of the dialogic and carnival, as well as the light thrown on contemporary discourse through Bakhtin's literary insights, the paper explores the extent to which networked learning artefacts and practices engage in parody and have been parodied. A thought experiment to parody a networked learning conference paper led to the current paper's structure. This attempt to parody highlights the difficulties of departing from conventional academic genres even in a field of study that challenges those genres. The study identifies how themes of genre, intertextuality and multimodality combine in papers and events about networked learning to produce texts and practices that are open to renewal, hacking and augmentation, but without the need for the laughter that comes with parody that might have the same results. In papers and book chapters, although there are lively forms of writing, heavy use of citation is the main source of intertextuality. Evidence of parody was found in a symposium, including (self) parody of networked learning conference practices, suggesting that we are more likely to find parody during synchronous events than in peer reviewed academic texts. An almost accidental result of the parodied structure of the paper suggests that networked learning could be developing in a way that parallels Bakhtin's understanding of the novel, yet without the cultural work that parody has contributed to the novel. This line of reasoning brings into sharper focus one of the key features of this author's own initial parody of networked learning: its emphasis on boundaries and boundary crossing. It seems that networked learning, like the novel, cannot be parodied as a 'complete' form: like the novel it is constantly changing to reflect its contemporary world.

Keywords

carnival, dialogue, genre, intertextuality, multimodality

'Laughter makes things close and familiar.' M.M. Bakhtin (1986) From 'Notes made in 1970-71'
'Please note that humour and irony are difficult to translate.' Template/guidelines for NLC papers

This paper was stimulated by an informal comment from a keynote speaker at the Networked Learning Conference in 2014, Steve Fuller. During the conference, he said something along the lines of: 'Networked learning doesn't have a distinctive literature of its own.' One inference from this might be that networked learning does not present a unified field of study. Its ways of thinking and practising (McCune and Hounsell, 2003) are not obvious. Its writing is not recognised as a separate genre, and it would therefore not be easy to parody it. This did not prevent Professor Fuller from attempting to do so, however – in his tribute to the lecture as a way of demonstrating thinking for oneself, he speculated: 'I know nowadays, especially to people in your community, the lecture is a kind of obsolete thing, you know, that in some sense can be very easily replaced by MOOCs, and stuff like this …' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujdnmk2UH-U . (13.23-14.00). This is arguably travesty rather than parody, though parody may be implicated and I hope to draw out the differences.

Though Fuller was not discussing parody, his observation and mimicry stuck with me, and resurfaced as I was reading Bakhtin's writing on parody and renewal. Bakhtin (1895-1975) is particularly noted for his work on dialogism and carnival in literature, extending beyond literary criticism (and indeed rejecting the precepts of formal criticism). For Bakhtin, parody plays a key role in the resistance of unifying or authoritarian practices, by bringing them to our attention through laughter. At best, parody does not destroy its target but opens up the possibility of dialogic discourse and continuity. I wondered whether such forms of renewal can be seen in our own field of networked learning, and whether parody might be of value to our continuity. A thought experiment on how to parody networked learning writing led to my headings for this paper – though I do not claim the paper as itself more of a parody than any other academic paper is. The result can be seen in Figure 1.

1 Agonise over definitions	Defining networked learning and parody
2 Cherry-pick antecedents from the community	Related themes in earlier papers
3 Come up with a novel metaphor	Where is the novel in networked learning?
4 Share examples of boundary crossing	Crossing the boundary into satire and travesty
5 Summarise in three categories	Genre, intertextuality and multimodality
6 Use/create expressions with post(-) as prefix	Pre-parodic networked learning
7 Set the study up as an alternative to tradition	What makes networked learning the new traditional?
	Inconclusion: unbounded territory
Plan for parody of networked learning paper	This paper's headings

Figure 1: Parodying a genre to help plan academic writing

Parody used like this relies on over-elaborated imitation of recognisable practices – parody fails if its antecedents are not recognisable – with an implied critique or gentle teasing ultimately inviting people to laugh. While provoking recognition and some amusement was my main intention, I found my parody remarkably helpful in planning this paper quickly (though not, I have to say, for writing it quickly). These headings sometimes imitate other people's – and my own – style in networked learning writing. Sometimes the headings use a word's ambiguity (such as the word 'novel') or reverse what is typical (pre instead of post). A parodist looks for opportunities to subvert or draw attention to anything that looks like the 'authoritative' approach – or, alternatively, to anything that appears to be veering too far from the norm for no good reason. To parody a networked learning genre would not entail destroying it, but would imply opening it up to further development and renewal, while constraining its worst excesses, if it has any. The ease of generating the headings did not surprise me: imitation is key to academic writing, and I use parody sometimes to encourage students to 'try on the peculiar ways…' (Bartholomae, 1986) of academic writing. However, my parody here has only served to create the plan of the paper. I do not really feel able to parody networked learning; rather, I am asking why it is not yet happening, or not much. I use the plan and its parodic observations to draw out my answers to this and consider the implications.

Defining networked learning and parody

My parody: Agonise over definitions

Authors have been encouraged by editors and reviewers at various stages to be explicit about their understanding of networked learning. Many authors of networked learning papers allude to the definition by Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson & McConnell (2004, p. 1) – 'learning in which information and communication technology (ICT) is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners; between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources'. Some may express concerns about what this definition masks, such as 'complexity of the social nature' (Boon & Sinclair, 2012, p 275), and others may wish to augment it (e.g. Dohn, 2016 p.30, who added its mediating role between contexts). Nevertheless, the frequency of citation of this definition suggests its authority. Masking, mediating and responding to authority underpin some themes in this paper, so the definition and commentaries serve as a useful starting point.

It is perhaps unkind of me to suggest that networked learning writers 'agonise over definitions' but I know that I have done, as suggested by the Boon & Sinclair citation above. As a reviewer I have seen many papers that start this way (and, as an academic, also many student assignments in imitation of academic papers). Definitions are continuing to be a challenge for this current study: 'the discussion of parody is bedevilled by disputes over definition, a fruitless form of argument unless there are matters of substance at stake' (Dentith, 2000, p. 6). There are matters of substance. Writers on parody, for example Dentith himself and also Margaret Rose (1993) allocate a considerable quantity of writing to definition, distinguishing parody from other forms of derivative work, and changes over times from ancient through medieval to postmodern. I use Figure 2 here to show my own preoccupations, and to indicate how my discussion of parody might veer into other topics. Some of these words can be found being used interchangeably in writing on this topic, and also in dictionaries where parody

ISBN 978-1-86220-337-2

may be defined as satire (for example) and vice versa. I shall suggest that the words on the right of the figure are those that may be cultivated by the networked learning community for positive ends.

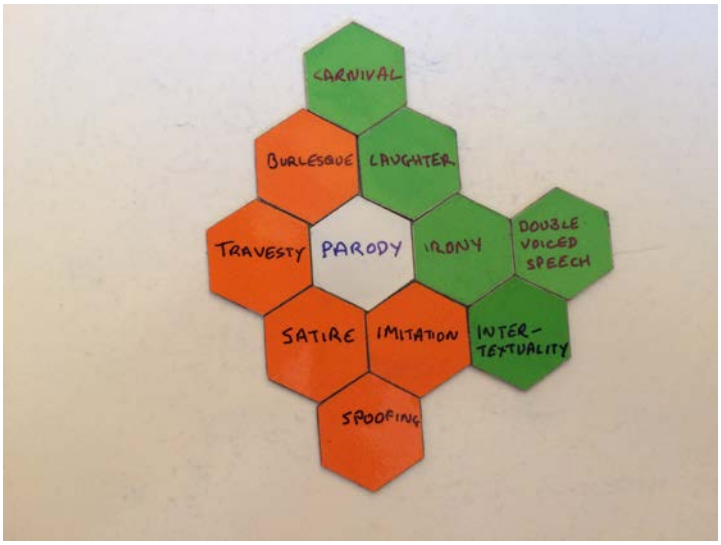

Figure 2: Parody in relation to associated topics

I shall not rehearse all the definitions associated with this diagram here, but will make reference to some of them as I unfold my case. However, Dentith's preliminary definition is my own starting point:

> 'Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice.' (Dentith, 2000, p.8)

My main influence from the literature on parody is from Bakhtin who is also a strong (though not unchallenged) influence on Dentith. I shall turn to a closer examination of Bakhtin's work shortly, including reference to some of Dentith's reservations; first, I explore what can be said about networked learning and parody.

Related themes in earlier papers

My parody: Cherry-pick antecedents from the community

Cherry-picking (seeking examples to make an explicit point rather than ensuring representation) is frowned on, but given such a prolific output from the networked learning community over two decades, what else can we do? A timely call in the summer of 2017 for networked learning writers to reflect on the conference's values (Hodgson & McConnell, 2018) prompted my own recollections on the output from these conferences. Here is a section of my response:

> Perhaps there have been some paradigm wrestling matches – tussles between familiar theoretical perspectives and practices, deprecated ones, and emergent ones. There has been an interesting extension of focus and domains, first towards informal education and then towards activist perspectives. There has perhaps been a shift from technologies for teaching to technologies for coding – and what happens to the data from these. These are probably natural responses to some of the perceived threats to our institutions and values that have also featured strongly in recent years.

This speaks to a dynamic and responsive context likely at least to coincide with Bakhtin's preoccupations with the dialogic, if not specifically invoking parody. The conversations have built on each other over the years and a glance at indexes in the post-conference books will show much citation of key players – check out Hodgson, for example, or Dirckinck-Holmfield, to see this. The index-scan would not indicate support for my search for parody or laughter, though – but there is plenty on dialogue and boundaries (in some, though not all, indexes) as suggested in my reflection above. So a search for papers in the post-conference books that might themselves involve parody or discussions of it proved fairly fruitless, yet I was aware of much laughter and some parody during the conferences themselves. I extended my search to include a quick scan of paper topics. I found some promising looking titles:

ISBN 978-1-86220-337-2

What did the Romans ever do for us? 'Next generation' networks and hybrid learning resources. Elaine Thomas, Steve Walker. 2012 Conference.

This title caught my attention because the initial question would be instantly recognisable, to some people, as coming from a parody (which is also a satire on religion), the Monty Python film 'Life of Brian' (1979). Used in this context, the question is an example of what Dentith (2006, p. 7) refers to as one of 'those glancing parodic allusions which are to be found very widely in writing'. The reference to 'next generation' suggests that there may be some parodic work around old and new. Interestingly, in the full paper, the question is used no longer in parody, but instead for literally exploring how technologies might support people investigating artefacts from the Roman Empire. The lack of parody as a theme in the paper does not disappoint me, though: the discussion about blurring boundaries between technology and the physical world is fascinating.

Becoming jelly: A call for gelatinous pedagogy within higher education. Søren S.E. Bengtsen, Rikke T. Nørgård 2014 Conference

An unusual and counter-intuitive metaphor in a title is always an attention-grabber. This approach is quite often used in networked learning contexts to signal a challenge to the current ways of doing things, particularly ways of talking. Here it is combined with enticing and beautiful images to help underline its points about the need to recognise the weird, the alluring, the terrifying, and the mongrel aspects of networked education, and the need for a language that acknowledges this. It has similar polemical aims as parody, and it certainly contains allusions to other cultural practices and texts, but does not actually use parody to make its case, nor does it need to.

The glow of unwork? Issues of portrayal in networked learning research. Maggi Savin-Baden and Gemma Tombs. 2016 Conference

'Unwork' is one of those inversions that suggest at least a challenge to contemporary practices, and possibly, through parody, an alternative to them. A parody of 'work' might expose the reader to previously unseen aspects of it. Although parody is not directly used, such exposure is definitely the aim. Unwork here refers to invisible work, which happens at interfaces, and the paper is concerned with the ways in which the participants in a piece of a research and their findings are portrayed. Like the previous example, it shows a concern for voices that need to be heard. It draws on interesting metaphors associated with space and place, and points to many issues of friction and invisibility at boundaries – but it does not need to use parody to do this.

Where have all the students gone? They are all on Facebook Now. Dennis Landgrebe Thomsen, Mia Thyrre Sørensen, Thomas Ryberg 2016 Conference.

Rhetorical questions are a popular device in paper headings, and this one hints at a parody of familiar laments of loss and death that might be seen in examples such as Pete Seeger's folk song 'Where have all the flowers gone?' – a tradition sufficiently long standing to have a Latin name 'ubi sunt'. That might be the 'glancing allusion' that draws us in, but it is not really a parody of such songs, nor even of the current situation. It is instead an excellent title in that it succinctly summarises what it says – the answer to the question is there in the title. It is to be taken literally. The title refers to a contemporary problem – and the answer (Facebook) suggests that any parodic contribution might be of the conservative rather than the subversive kind (Dentith, 2000 p. 9) – that is, it would attempt to draw attention to a new practice that is veering too far from the norm or tradition. Dentith highlights this normative or corrective function of parody in a way that is not so apparent in Bakhtin's work. However, although they see a need for a critical perspective towards the informal learning practices they recognise, the authors are not parodying anything.

This exploration suggests that a tendency to use playful language and ideas in writing about networked learning is tempered with a careful unfolding of serious points, expressed in literal terms, especially in relation to papers intended for the public gaze, and a global public at that. It might be argued that there is no place in academic writing for parody; it is a serious business. It is also perhaps not up to us to parody ourselves in our academic papers, but we are certainly up for the kinds of development and renewal that are associated with parody. Although my cherry-picking of networked learning titles has not given me much to say about the role of parody for our community, it has identified some related themes to weave into my argument: boundary crossing, allusions to other texts, use of metaphor and media and – present in all of the examples – new ways of doing, being, and expressing 'voice' in education. But the analysis also shows the need to go beyond titles. I was aware that there had been laughter and decided to look at what happens during events. A closer examination of an event that took place at the 2014 conference, under the seemingly innocuous title of 'Actor-Network Theory Double-Symposium', indicates that the spirit of parody is alive and well in Networked Learning conferences.

Actor-Network Theory Double-Symposium. Steve Wright, enrolled members of the ANT Facebook Group.

The symposium itself had some unexpected elements, while preserving – with transgressions – the genre of a conference symposium. Indeed, it even invoked the older form of the ancient Greek symposium, an ironic use of

tradition to subvert the status quo. The Symposium Introduction shows some of the workings of what was planned, speaking directly to potential participants at the conference. It contains an explanation of its own breach of the template instructions for submitting a proposal to the conference. It exposes how agency is lost through such templates. It sets out what was to happen in the symposium, including talking, thinking and drinking (as happened in Ancient Greece) – with a beer tasting, which was also used to demonstrate other practices associated with actor-network theory (ANT). The media, modes and materiality to be used indicate an intention to practise and enact phenomena and theories being considered – actor networked theory, communities of practice, and cultural historical activity theory. Or, as Steve put it succinctly: 'to speak truth to acronyms by representing this as an ANT having a CHAT with a COP'. The laughter generated did not destroy the templates, theoretical perspectives, invisible rules of the conference, and ways of writing about networked learning, but it did expose and challenge them.

The parody in this final example is reminiscent of Bakhtin's exploration of laughter and parody (and indeed satire, travesty and burlesque) in the medieval carnival, particularly as portrayed by Rabelais (Bakhtin, 1984a). Parody of official and religious orthodoxy through the language of the market-place and folk-humour provides a safe opportunity for disempowered people to vent opposition to authority, and laugh at themselves in the process, but still challenge the status quo and leave the way open to renewal. For Bakhtin, 'Carnival existed not as a form of agency but as a reminder that agency was possible' (Renfrew, 2015, p. 135). Actor-network theory provides another such reminder; so does the carnivalistic way it was enacted at the 2014 conference.

Where is the novel in networked learning?

My parody: Come up with a novel metaphor

The reuse of tropes from other genres, lively metaphors, and neologisms that suggest inversion or subversion are all present in the texts I identified above as well as in the symposium. I had anticipated some novelty in approach to networked learning topics in my parody of a paper, and that led to my question about 'the novel' in the subtitle above. There is an ambiguity in this word – one that allows me to suggest 'the novel' (in its literary sense) as a possible metaphor or analogy for networked learning. There is potentially a strong resonance for networked learning with what Bakhtin has to say about the novel. Parody usually depends on what Bakhtin calls 'double-voiced' discourse. This means that the reader or listener experiences both what the original person and the parodist have to say, simultaneously. Usually the original voice retains its power, but the important factor is that the other voice is still heard. A major influence on Bakhtin's extended account of the dialogic was the work of Dostoevsky, because this was seen to permit multiple voices, as opposed to expressing a single authorial voice. The author is capable not only of hearing his hero but of answering him as well (Bakhtin, 1984b). After categorising Dostoevsky as a unique writer, Bakhtin ironically went on in an essay entitled 'Discourse in the Novel' (Bakhtin, 1981) to create a unifying theoretical perspective both about the genre of the novel itself and the dialogical nature of all communication. As Renfrew (2015) observes, he quickly 'moves to universalize what he initially attributes to Dostoevsky' (p.79). Bakhtin's enthusiasm for the novel because it is not subject to closure as a genre (and therefore less amenable to parody) was expressed in his essay 'Epic in the novel':

> 'The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it.' (Bakhtin, 1981 p.7)

Decades later, we can be tempted to say the same about networked learning as an educational development. It too attempts to capture the multi-voiced nature of contemporary communication. Authors who recognise this quality (e.g. Wegerif, 2013) can build on Bakhtin's attention to 'unbounded' dialogic space. But if the analogy holds, then it may offer an explanation of little or no parodying of networked learning forms.

Crossing the boundary into satire and travesty

My parody: share examples of boundary crossing

I particularly associate networked learning papers with challenging boundaries: I found in writing this paper that attention to boundaries of the definition of parody was helpful in thinking about what might be bounded and what might not and how.

ISBN 978-1-86220-337-2

At the start of the paper, I categorised Professor Fuller's comments about 'MOOCs and that kind of thing' as travesty rather than parody. Current uses of the word 'travesty' imply an attempt to reduce or diminish especially through a deliberately inadequate representation. There is a suggestion in Fuller's humour that the traditional will be swept away with thoughtless implementation of 'the latest thing' – a discourse familiar in discussions of MOOCs. There has probably been more written to deprecate the hype associated with MOOCs than there has about MOOCs' actual potential. If the MOOC has been trying to be a serious contender to be the main representation of networked learning, most people in networked learning circles would agree that this is not going to happen. But it is difficult to have a conversation about networked learning with this assumption as a starting point. Similarly, comments from colleagues who categorise themselves as luddites or traditionalists before going on to denigrate networked learning as 'whizzy' or superficial can be difficult to deal with precisely because the speaker 'doesn't get it'. Travesty can be dangerous because its reductive approach renders invisible some of the key values of the target, leaving nothing to talk about.

Satire, is perhaps even more dangerous because it involves personal attacks, using parody to do so. Bakhtin saw satire as one of the precursors of the novel because it attacked the established literary and cultural conventions. Like parody, with which it is closely associated sometimes to the point of synonym, satire has developed over time and is widely used today with political and celebrity targets. When satire is very strong, it can displace its original; we no longer recognise the satirised targets of 'Don Quixote' (Cervantes, 1605), which is often identified as the first modern novel. In our own time, satire about current events is in danger of becoming conflated with 'fake news', though as Cooke (2017) points out, this is not a new phenomenon. In a study of metacoverage of satirical reporting, Brewer et al (2013) draw attention to the need to recognise the intertextuality of accounts of political humour, its targets, and fake news. Writing about how we satirise events can itself contribute to how those events are perceived, by drawing further attention to them. An extra layer is added to the double voicing, possibly providing a reason for steering clear of such forms of cultural practice (which are often seen as debased). Yet we do know that parody and satire are pervasive, especially in a situation where authority is challenged and tend to have a strong place in informal and activist learning – our more recent focuses for networked learning. Satire is then perhaps more likely to change things than travesty, and it uses parody to do so – which ceases to be parody when its antecedent is forgotten. In this way, whole ways of doing things can be changed for ever. Bakhtin saw this with the development of the novel:

> 'The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them.' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 5)

Thus parody might be a tool used mercilessly in relation to other genres. However, if it is true that 'we cannot decide in advance on the cultural politics of parody' (Dentith, 2000 p.186), perhaps we cannot just adopt it as a tool in a repertoire of cultural practice. We can't predict how it will work in a given context – whether it will challenge authority, limit the excesses of new ideas, or expose flaws in our current practices, or simply let us laugh at ourselves and others. We might have an intention in one of these directions, of course, which may be partly successful. If the parallel with the novel can hold, then networked learning could indeed be dangerous to some traditional forms (or genres) of education. In re-formulating or re-accentuating them – we might even add 'hacking' to this – we are going to create some disturbance. It is no wonder that we are interested in what happens at boundaries, and how they are crossed. However, if we accept that, like the novel, networked learning is a genre that is 'born of this new world', it may not (yet) be itself subject to such displacement.

Genre, intertextuality and multimodality

My parody: Summarise in three categories

The 'rule of three' is a well known rhetorical device in academic writing and public presentation in general – it is an easy target for imitation. The three themes in the subheading above seemed likely to belong both to networked learning and to a broader account of dialogism, so my 'summary' here is of the potential interrelationships between my theoretical framework and my theme of parody. My brief selection from the networked learning literature certainly highlighted intertextuality and multimodality. Genre and intertextuality have just been identified as significant for development in writing and other communicative practices, though both of these words may be problematic (Duff, 2002). The notion of 'genre' – a form limited by style and convention – might be troubled by exactly the kind of borders and boundaries that are open to resistance.

Bakhtin was introduced to the west through the concept of 'intertextuality', coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. He (or his translators) did not use the word; however, his work on the dialogic and the notion of 'double-

ISBN 978-1-86220-337-2

voiced discourse' influenced Kristeva (1986) in developing her idea of intertextuality where one text is shaped through knowledge of another. Parody is just one form of intertextuality; its relationship to existing genres, conventions, institutions and practices relies on its ability to allude to these in ways that can be recognised, to imitate them and provoke laughter. As might be expected, a combined internet search for "networked learning" and "intertextuality" reveals far more examples than a similar search with parody. Networked learning may not need parody in order to recognise and exploit the nature of intertextuality; its texts can rely not only on explicit and implicit allusions, and use of genre and referencing conventions, but also on its preoccupation with the flow of knowledge across boundaries. Writers in networked learning are well able to imitate, but do not need the laughter that accompanies imitation in parody. Parody – at least, in response to a quick search – seems not to be present in standard academic papers in networked learning and its contributing fields.

Even where I did find parody, the academic texts associated with the symposium were not written as parodies but in the recognisable genre of academic writing. Its introduction, where parody is hinted at, is a different kind of text from an academic one. The main difference with the symposium was in the range of practices involved, which were intensely multimodal as well as material. Multimodality intuitively feels as though it is not only opening up our academic communication practices, but also the potential for parody. Some reflection on this leads me to wonder whether there may be a connection between low levels of parody and fear of plagiarism. Academic texts have developed rigid conventions, including those that support prevention of plagiarism; some forms of intertexuality, including parody, run the risk of accusations of plagiarism. Although accusations do arise with multimodal forms (especially music), plagiarism is less foregrounded than it is in writing. This topic is beyond the scope of the current paper, though related to it, and is worthy of investigation. For now, the main point is that multimodality is how networked learning augments texts and, occasionally, engages in parody.

Pre-parodic networked learning

My parody: Use/create expressions with post(-) as a prefix

I thought it appropriate in my parody to allude to our tendency to use the prefix 'post' (postmodern, posthuman, postdigital etc). In planning the paper, it seemed that by this stage I would want to say something about the current status of networked learning and how to make it more recognisable so that it can be parodied, so I inverted this prefix to create 'pre-parodic'. It is perhaps becoming obvious that parody is no longer what I want to do: I do not want parodies of networked learning that might cross boundaries into travesty and satire. It would be preferable to seek the benefits that parody can bring without the potential for negative forms of laughter. I now see the pre-parodic state as a blessing, but also as an inevitability in the light of my Bakhtinian perspective that encourages me to draw parallels with the novel. (This does not ensure we will not eventually be parodied.)

However, my analysis has highlighted the fact that the academic paper or book chapter continues to be the main form of currency in networked learning. Intertextuality in these forms of writing comes via the academic reference. Academic papers, including this one, are heavy with citations and the complex academic expressions derived from them. As I planned this paper, I speculated that networked learning as a movement might in future be associated with whatever replaces current forms of academic rather than with the closed and completed forms belonging to the 'Gutenberg parenthesis' (Pettit, 2012). This view of the print era suggests that authoritative and monologic accounts as bounded forms have interrupted a naturally open and unbounded dialogic approach to human communication. While we are likely to incorporate into what is ahead some features of the past 500 years – from the dominance of printing – there are undoubtedly newer forms of writing around (Fitzpatrick 2011) We may need to prepare ourselves for this; as suggested at the end of the previous section, the use of multimodal texts and practices is likely to be our signature way of doing so.

What makes networked learning the new traditional?

My parody: Set the study up as an alternative to tradition

The parody seems to have turned into self-parody. Far from establishing networked learning as the new traditional, it is emerging as the new 'novel'. The 'new' is what everyone is perhaps seeking in their networked learning writing; there is a wish to challenge established genres of education, including online education. We do not need to parody these, just to critique them and seek boundaries to cross and dismantle. Yet some of the new alternatives of networked learning genres – of writing, theory, or practice – might aspire to be part of the 'canon' for networked learning, and even to displace other forms. The 'paradigm wrestling matches' that I noticed in my reflections on networked learning might suggest that renewal is happening anyway.

ISBN 978-1-86220-337-2

> 'Parodic stylizations of canonized genres and styles occupy an essential place in the novel.… But it is characteristic that the novel does not permit any of these various individual manifestations of itself to stabilize.' (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 6)

There is perhaps a hint of that lack of stabilization with some networked learning trends and practices. Just as Dickens', or even Dostoevsky's work does not provide a blueprint for the novel, we are not going to be able to establish the genre of networked learning through or in response to parody. In a delayed riposte to Professor Fuller, the MOOC – in any of its canonized forms of certain approaches to education – is not going to 'be' networked learning. The expression 'the novel does not permit' is not about the authoritarianism of a fixed genre but is about the potential of unlimited genres. Similarly, networked learning cannot be easily imitated and belittled in its entirety, but emerges instead as 'an unbounded dialogic space' (Wegerif, 2013 p. 49).

Inconclusion: unbounded territory

The final heading is a parody of my whole approach – like other networked learning writers, I want to draw attention to the problem of conventional structures and boundaries. 'Inconclusion' is not a word – it is a signal that conclusions are sometimes inappropriate. My attempt at parody has shown me that parody is not currently needed in networked learning: that does not mean it will not arise at some stage, and we will need to be aware of both the origin and direction of the laughter. We would also want to know how the laughter is mediated: might algorithms be involved, for example? We should perhaps hope that if we do have to be subject to parody, it will come in the form of 'homage' rather than travesty. A parody of networked learning could be a tribute to it.

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