



## No False Promises

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At the close of another year, viewers eagerly looking forward to a dramatic episode of a favourite TV series took to Twitter to exclaim over (not another invasion of Daleks ...) but rather an invasion of politics concerning Brexit (O'Connor 2019) into a preserve of digital entertainment that they hoped might be free of such concerns. At the same time, the news media discussed these viewers as 'fuming' (Rodger 2019) and 'livid' (O'Sullivan 2019), providing fuel for a thriving 'outrage industry' (Behr 2017) that, to be fair, does not discriminate. Stories of human slavery (BBC 2017) or murder (BBC 2018a) routinely spark 'outrage' now, alongside the gender of Dr. Who (Scott Byrne 2017). These are reminders of how easily words are manipulated and invested with new meaning across different contexts, as people and technological platforms have merged, yielding new 'postdigital realities' (Sinclair and Hayes 2018). Whilst collective emotions, expressed via Twitter, exposed the soiling of a source of escapism with political point-scoring around Brexit (@pierreotlegeek 2019), others saw this as part of a wider mass manipulation (@bemusedbyitall 2019) or even called for fictional characters to become our new world leaders (Lawson 2019). Such is the complexity of our modern communications, where personal agendas now visibly trip over former boundaries, whether cultural, institutional or political. We now have more means for self-publication than we ever have time to humanly exploit. This leaves me wondering ... who then is manipulating who, and how much does it matter? This is certainly not a question that I can answer alone, so I turn to my fellow authors in this inaugural issue of Postdigital Science and Education, and in later issues to come, to help build much-needed collective knowledge on the endless postdigital encounters observable in day-to-day life.

I opened this editorial with this particular example, not because it is unusual, but rather because it seems to lay bare—across public, social platforms—the inextricable links between technology and human ideology. Links that have always been present across time, but now are revealed (if we choose to notice them) as they play out across digital forums. Technologies are 'a means of structuring the world', and whilst 'beliefs are embedded in the very fabric of our technologies, we often fail to interrogate them seriously' (Matthewman 2011: 72). Of course, whether a wider recognition of how politics and discourse intersperse with technology (Winner 1980) moves us into a

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‘postdigital era’ is still up for debate. As Andrew Feenberg observes in this issue: ‘the digital is integrated and imbricated with our everyday actions and interactions’ (Feenberg 2019). This is a situation that can change lives for better and for worse. Whilst some people use digital means to explain why they have now quit social media (BBC 2018b) to pay more attention to the world around them, others experience changes to their lives through social media publicity concerning their immediate danger (@rahaf84427714 2019, BBC 2019) or poverty (Allen and Bell 2019). Many other voices worldwide remain unheard, via these platforms. As pointed out by Mazierska (2018), even if we resist all that is digital “we still have to play by the ‘digital playbook’”. So in this journal we simply adopt ‘postdigital’ as a talking point, a means for a wide and inclusive exploration of these human-digital circumstances that cut across science and education and affect all of our lives.

Petar’s request for a second editorial from one of the journal’s Associate Editors reinforces the widely inclusive approach towards publishing that Postdigital Science and Education stands for. Whilst Petar may regret inviting my input ... now I have opened with tales from Dr. Who ... there are many triggers of this kind that can prompt authors to develop new postdigital understandings. When wondering which of the many interesting aspects of Petar’s editorial and invitation to authors I might further explore, I found appealing the concept that writers for Postdigital Science and Education might together become ‘a clog’ (Jandrić 2018) in ‘the dirty little industrial machine of academic publishing’ (Peters in Jandrić 2017: 52). I wanted to know what this might mean to both a person who stumbles across Postdigital Science and Education as a new potential author, or to an extensively published academic who grows weary with more restrictive publishing traditions. I believe Petar’s notion of a clog (albeit a productive one) unites us all.

I would like to think also that postdigital perversities (like the Dr. Who scenario captured above) might help to reveal numerous postdigital possibilities, where technology is approached *critically* by a larger open community of authors than ever before. This has potential to clog up, and slow down, a conveyor belt of publications that treat technology as a rational solution alone. As Fawns points out, this approach can ‘close down ideas or attribute essential properties to technology’ (Fawns 2018). Networked Learning has always sought to explore critical pedagogical responses towards technology across the disciplines. As such it feels ripe to unite this wealth of theory with other emerging ideas and to feed visions for Postdigital Education (Hodgson and McConnell 2019). This requires a scrutiny of how the postdigital influences education policy (Hayes 2019), when populist viewpoints tell us how to think of university learning, in narrow economic terms alone, as a ‘false promise’ (Sellgren 2019). As Joss Winn’s review of Richard Hall’s (2018) book *The Alienated Academic. The Struggle for Autonomy Inside the University* reveals, the numerous agendas faced by colleagues in marketised Higher Education are still fundamentally rooted in the ‘critical category of labour’ (Winn 2019). The postdigital presents exciting opportunities for immanent critique, by locating irony and contradiction, alongside positive change, in society’s rules and systems. We can review our avenues for human expression, and our resistance, to an ever-present ‘rationalised domination of the masses’ (McLaren 2018), but only if we surface and share these insights.

More than ever before, layers of political meaning now enter the realms of entertainment and are in turn drawn from it. In reading the headlines above, it struck me that

the initial indignation of viewers across a technological forum reveals both a very human wish not to be deceived and also one to be heard. Though instantly seized and manipulated by media moguls, the anger that people expressed (albeit concerning Dr. Who) suggests humans still value authenticity. A pressing postdigital challenge lies in how to recognise authenticity, and indeed to write authentically, when all modern channels of communication appear to be open for the business of manipulation. Whilst humans have always been manipulated as part of someone's project, now more than ever, we have endless means for both instant and more enduring forms of manipulation. Therefore, between praising and attacking the digital, there is a wealth of scope in paying attention to new forms of manipulation, but also empowerment, that the digital enables.

This is easier said than done, when the same words used for powerful change can equally become attached to the trivial. Yet, whilst 'discourse (language-in-use) shapes how we experience the postdigital' (Sinclair and Hayes 2018), we also have the means to build new collective knowledge in how we critically *combine* words and 'attribute human labour' (Hayes 2019). Each of us notices authenticity differently. From the observation of a child, to the new perspective a research student forms in dialogue with their supervisor, from a thought shared in the pub, to a photograph taken from a unique angle. Though masked by many 'fake stories and bullshit' (MacKenzie and Bhatt 2018), authentic, critical forms of writing are still a powerful form of resistance. The interplay of the postdigital, science, and education surrounds all of us, wherever we are and whatever we do. Finding a voice is the first step. Begin to write freely, do not stop, then review what you have written (Hayes 2017: 260). Do it alone, or do it with others (Jandrić 2018, Jandrić et al. 2018). Postdigital Science and Education offers a route to all who develop authentic perspectives on the postdigital to share them, and to grow a community that empowers, rather than one that overtly manipulates.

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