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SEDUCED, THEN ABANDONED: THE 'CEE-DEE' WAY TO EQUITY IN OPEN LEARNING

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Abstract:

The realities and needs of distance-education students center around a delivery channel with accessibility, interactivity, speed and reliability. Contrary to the prophesies extolled by those with a passion for being on-line, students having access to the Internet and, therefore, university study materials, usually have that privilege through their workplace. Unemployed students consequently are disadvantaged twice: once in being unemployed and, second, by being unable to meet the costs of accessing the on-line way in education. New media in borderless education, thus, must do more than simply saving paper and providing the opportunity for those involved to brag about being on-line. In the scramble to get "on board and on-line" in the delivery of distance education materials, some providers may fall victim to inappropriate technology decisions. Our paper will report on our trial with using CD-ROM to deliver our distance education in journalism to students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Our paper will contend that New Communication and Information Technologies must be as reliable and accessible as the old; they must be as simple as learning through using a combination of a VCR, a television set, a box of videotapes and a book. We will show in our presentation that CD-ROM is the superior option, because it provides greater equity in access while combining reasonably high quality interactive video and text while retaining the option for students to go on-line.
Introduction:

Ever since the Internet was used by academics to facilitate their research collaboration and access to information, excitement over the Net's implications for open learning has been extraordinary. As players ourselves in post-graduate education to off-campus students in an environment dominated by "new communication technologies" (NCTs), we are being compelled to re-examine our multiple roles as teachers, subject experts, instructional designers and mentors for students we see daily on campus. There are those who we know only through their written assignments, facsimiles, telephone enquiries and, occasionally, when they have the on-line capability, by emails.

The gradual full "on-line" delivery of post-graduate education to students in distant locations is inevitable. Students now have more learning choices. Consequently, as media educators, we expect students to become more skilled at managing their own learning through the "on-line" materials. The electronic forms of courses are more likely to have greater possibilities for interactivity than the more linear distance learning structure embedded in the traditional pre-packaged printed study materials despatched to students at the beginning of each new academic session. In making the transition from conventional distance education pre-packaged materials to online delivery, one should always ask: would the on-line delivery method, with its vaunted "interactivity" in a "virtual campus" actually open up more access for students who otherwise would not have enrolled in post-graduate education?

Institutional application of on-line communication technologies by traditional "distance education" providers is often qualified by marrying the concepts of "on-line interactivity" to a "virtual campus". Despite their hyped upmarketability, the concepts belie the muffled disappointments by off-campus students, located in areas with inadequate telecommunication infrastructure, who often find it near to impossible to go "on-line" to maximise their learning outcomes. As premised on the assumption that the nature of knowledge is influenced by the way in which information is shaped and transferred by specific medium, this technical glitch goes right into the heart of our concern with student equity in accessing post-graduate education in the "virtual campus' environment.

Our post-graduate journalism education program offered in Australia and Hong Kong has demonstrated that students holding jobs have a clear advantage. Contrary to the prophesies extolled by those with a passion for being on-line, we have found in both Australia and Hong Kong that students having access to the Internet and, therefore,
university study materials, usually have that privilege through their work place. Unemployed students consequently are disadvantaged twice: once in being unemployed and, second, by being unable to meet the costs of online access from their home. Students working in organisations with online access are those most likely to have the computer power to access University course information. The computer memory required to access these materials is largely due to the way in which the information is packaged by the providers. Consequently, access to open learning is conditional in terms of occupational status and income levels. This raises serious issues over access and equity.

Despite varied laudatory media reports on the promises of NCTs in reducing inequalities and extending educational, cultural and human opportunities locally and internationally, the actual institutional application of interactive NCTs, and its impact on students' open learning in both quantitative and qualitative terms remains an area of conjecture. As Marshal McLuhan noted in "Wired" magazine:

The hubbub now about equality is actually a nostalgia for machines. Our environment has been transformed into a single omnipresent network that embraces and encompasses individuals of unequal status. Machines - extended to their limit and transformed into a single omnipresent network environment - will flip into sacred and ritual environments. Recognized as an extension of ourselves and properly managed by a priestly class, technology inspires rituals, performed out of something like love. This development restores machines to their original totemic purpose.

Shrouding the notions of "on-line interactivity" and a "virtual campus" is a somewhat confused market operationalisation of the terms. Various academic typologies and classifications have been used to describe the different levels of interaction that NCT media bring to the off-campus student. NCT media in this context can range from computer modems and the Internet to CD-ROMS, MUDS, IRCs and ICQs.

While NCT has made possible the creation of a "virtual campus" learning environment, an examination of the literature, and from our experience in providing online postgraduate journalism courses, we are not too sanguine with the claim that the on-line interactive nature of open learning provided by "virtual universities" is superior to the old information technology -- that is, hardcopy instructional materials. Our paper rests on the premise that on-line technology can only be a useful delivery tool if the students
in otherwise socially and economically disadvantaged situations are the ones empowered with the technology.

As Cunningham (1998:11) suggests:

A realistic assessment of the situation is that there is a great deal of enthusiasm and many initiatives have been launched, but very few have progressed beyond the earliest stages. Despite the talking-up of the 'global' opportunities presented to education providers in a world made more accessible by new technologies, we found no evidence of any global education providers targeting local or national markets. While recognising that many of these ventures are only beginning, and some will fail, it is clear that there are fundamental shifts occurring in the conception of higher education and its delivery.

Consequently, in their clamor to go on-line and be technologically up therein the information technologies, university educators have lost sight of the importance of student equity and the fact that effective learning is more a function of instructional design than the delivery medium on its own.

Issues Of Interactivity

It is generally accepted that "interactivity" will increase the effectiveness of open learning. Our main interest is to find the most productive way to provide effective learning to distance students. Overtime we hope to arrive at a clearer position from which to examine how the concept of "interactivity", in relation to the communication process, is understood by open learning providers.

Generally, "interactivity" in the education process is said to take place when students are involved in mutual discourse with their peers and lecturers, or are responding in creative ways to the multi-media instructional materials. By mutual discourse, it means students can exchange, peruse, navigate and manipulate information based on previous transactional acts. In well designed packages, it will mean that student players can control and exchange roles in their mutual discourse. This level of interactivity can take the form of virtual worlds that simulate human activity and culture, or provide live conversation between students and lecturers, for instance in a video-conference.
environment. Obviously this provides the highest form of interactivity for a distance online open learning approach.

To a lesser degree, interactivity also occurs between students and their peers or lecturers through an on-line chat medium. With easy links to relevant sites that provide further reading, interactivity, navigation and information in the multi-media form, the educational process can become something like drinking water from a high pressure fire hose. The least amount of interactivity is experienced with information-retrieval systems such as online library catalogue and information kiosks which allow no degree of influence or change in the system content by the students.

>From this conceptual framework, we contend that NCTs require a high degree of "online" literacy and property (hardware and software license) to maximise its utility. NCT will offer only limited success in the equitable delivery of 'distance' post-graduate education to an audience from disparate language, technological, cultural and economic groupings. As levels of interactivity are determined by students' access to hardware and software capacities, a 'virtual' campus, as currently conceptualised by 'distance education' providers, will inevitably create disparate subcultures of students between those who can afford to go online and those who can't.

Indeed, the realities and needs of off-campus students in the environment of push technology can only be met by a delivery channel which provides equitable accessibility, interactivity, speed and reliability. It also cannot be denied that the filmic image and its connected sound, hold an absolute primacy in conveying densely packed information with high levels of viewer active interactivity.

New media in borderless education, then, must do more than simply showing some amazingly clear but still little videos on your computer. Using NCTs for education will cost too much if it is used simply for saving paper and providing the opportunity for those involved to brag about being on-line with a sexy site. Ultimately, in the scramble to get "on board and on-line" in the delivery of distance education materials, some providers will fall to inappropriate technology decisions.

As an alternative to the "online" medium, our paper reports on an ongoing trial using CD-ROM in delivering post-graduate journalism education to students across different socio-economic groups. Our paper describes the procedures we have used to develop an "interactive" media application environment through a "Radio Edit Suite" developed for a course in JOUR 931 Broadcasting Journalism. The
Radio Edit Suite basically provides a "virtual" radio station with a versatility and portability to take students through the learning process via a generally affordable mid-range personal home computer with a CD-drive.

Our paper contends that for any NCT media to be effective as a delivery tool, they must be as reliable and accessible as the old; they must be as simple as learning through using a combination of a VCR, a television set, a box of videotapes and a book. In this context, we have resorted to the idea of the "game-like" CD-ROM derived from the public fascination with the logic of the computer games' 'interactivity'. The universal culture of the CD game may begin to work as a medium to foster greater equity among students from different socio-economic, cultural and technical backgrounds.

Our paper describes the process of building the CD ROM version of Broadcasting Journalism which was transformed from a subject-based approach to problem-based learning environment. Guiding our development were three primary components of the 'ideal' open learning environment -- collaboration, feedback, and reflection. The tool would be developed so that it would eventually contain a self-contained audio edit suite that was industry relevant, on-board, fast, simple, reliable and portable. It is intended that the student takes the tool with them throughout the sequenced journalism exercises and resources. The resources all serving to provide the student with texts on how to write for radio combined with audio files and large and legible Quicktime movies that can be used in actually editing the story in a CD ROM driven learning environment.

Our paper rests on the pedagogic philosophy that learning is more a function of instructional design than gimmickry input from the latest media technology fad. Nevertheless, we do recognise that once an instructional design is settled on, some media do work better than others in achieving the learning objectives. We will show in our presentation that CD ROM can be the more functional option because it provides greater equity in access while combining reasonably high quality interactive video and text on a stable reliable platform for large files. The main advantage of a CD-ROM is that the option for students to go on line through the Internet is retained in its architecture while the large and slow to load files are held jointly and locally along with the audio edit suite on the CD-ROM or the computer's hard drive.

Premised in our CD-ROM concept is that the courseware delivered by NCT should be user-friendly to enable the information poor to catch up. User-friendly courseware should have the following traits common in the 'computer/video games' environment:
* The medium should look like things we already know, such as a typewriter, a VCR, a TV screen.

* The complex process involved in searching and selecting for information should be broken down into small conversational steps.

* Students should be given a sense of control by building into the courseware indicators that they are doing the right thing.

* Students should be given leeways to control the rate at which they interact with the course contents.

**Equitable Access: No Kidding**

The Web is cool. Cooler than television, which is much cooler than print. ... [To] become a feature of the landscape is very difficult in a cool medium. Your brand must always be present in the back of the user's mind. Everything they see, no matter how unrelated, should give them "memories of you." Any moment of questioning or hesitation (and there will be many, since cool media require lots of participation and demand many choices) should call forth the suggestion, "Click here" to become part of the landscape in a cool medium.  

As providers of flexible and distance journalism education we felt that we should provide a cheap on-line capability that seamlessly connects to the net and specifically, to the course coordinator for feedback and fast turnaround of submitted and assessed student news scripts. This way the distance isolated student is not alone with overpowering piles of theory and instructional materials. Where the on-line capability is not available, the student should still be able to receive and send materials through fax or mail.

Despite Hong Kong's techno-rich first world reputation and capability, many students, like those in Australia, cannot afford on-line capabilities. We found that students with on-line computers usually worked with organizations that provided that on-line capability as part of the job. In the clamor to get on-line and be technologically capable for distance and flexible delivery, university educators may be losing sight of equity and realistically grounded pedagogical issues. When it comes to computers, student attitudes and skills are directly related to the amount of access to computers at a frequented place, either work or home.

It is clear that home consumption of information technology equipment is indirectly linked to income. For instance, in Canada in 1996, the 20% of households with the highest
income were four times more likely to have a home computer than the 20% with the lowest household income. 7

The myths over equal and empowering access for all are perpetuated by those who stand to gain the most from assuming that everyone is on-line or soon will be.

High on the list is the myth that we now live in an 'information age' - when in fact, we live in a media age, in which the available information is repetitive, 'safe and limited by invisible boundaries. 8

Information is packaged, managed and targeted to niches where money lurks.

Today, we are just swimming in information. It is a sort of lactic sea.
In the emerging global village, isn't it imperialistic to expect everyone to have the same values (ours), obey the same laws (ours), and communicate in American English? America is no longer a global power - it's a global brand. 9

This niching is now across socio-economic and cultural targets in all countries. Only those who can afford the hardware, software and the on-line capability are realistically in the market.

Children of unskilled workers in Britain and Australia are no more likely to attend university and have access to information technologies, than they were in the 1970s. The Labour governments in both countries have been, as much as the conservatives, part of a complex and one way process that ended free higher education. Three-quarters of the people surveyed in Britain believe that a class war is still being fought and they represent the highest proportion holding such views since surveying began. 10 The assumption that everyone will be able to afford to be on-line is part of the process of building greater inequity.

Changing Course Midstream

The Graduate School of Journalism (GSJ) was established in 1990 at the University of Wollongong, New South Wales dedicated to the teaching of critically-oriented professional journalism education. The School offers the following full-time coursework program: Master of Journalism (Pass) and research degrees - Master of Arts (Journalism) and doctorates.
Since February 1997, the School has introduced two successful graduate courses. First is the four-subject Graduate Certificate in Multicultural Journalism offered off campus to media professionals from 68 language groups, in cooperation with the national television network, Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) in Sydney and Melbourne. Second is the two-year part-time eight-subject Master of Journalism program offered through the Open University of Hong Kong.

The School's pedagogic philosophy is built on an integrated and flexible structure of subjects written and tailored to meet the professional and academic needs of individual students. While the educational foundation is built on skills-oriented instruction, students are also taught ethical and critical media theory in the context of comparative journalistic realities.

Seminars and workshops are normally geared towards critical reflections on journalistic practice, news culture and values, and potential for change in the workplace. The School's comparative approach to journalism education and training is drawn from the multicultural makeup of the students, the broad media experience of our academic staff and "leading edge" technology that the University infrastructure offers.

Subjects offered by GSJ are written in consultation with experienced media professionals and media academics from Australia. Most of our materials are now sited in the World Wide Web at "www.uow.edu.au/crearts/journalism/index.html". Contents in the home page and open learning resource packages are continually updated to respond to industry trends, and, increasingly, a demand by students who can afford to own personal home computers, or who are fully-employed in other States.

GSJ has an open admission policy which means that applicants with no formal qualifications are admitted based on their work experience. Consequently, our student population is heterogeneous regarding their prior knowledge, study habits, motivation and situational circumstances. Since our foundation, we have been involved in developing course materials suitable for distance education. Materials were mostly prepared in written form and designed especially for guided self-tuition. When functionally required, "interactive" media applications such as audio, video, computer, interactive CD Rom have been included as part of the course materials. CD-Rom is a technology which the University is increasingly supporting as a matter of policy.
As an interactive multi media and flexible mode of delivery, CD ROM was the best
direction for the large resource-dependent curriculum of Broadcasting Journalism.
Logistic problems with the delivery of our first online course-- On-line and Research
Journalism -- through the Internet gave us reason to think of more effective and practical
ways for Broadcasting Journalism. We needed a clear and navigable mode of
delivery that would combine print based study guides interactively with audio and video
resources. This led us to think of an active and stimulating student centered learning
space that can be miniaturised in one neat and compact package -- dubbed the "Radio
Edit Suite" CD-ROM.

The "Radio Edit Suite" CD-ROM package is a virtual radio station with audio and text
based resources coupled onto a study guide on how to write for radio. The portable edit
suite goes with the player in a learn-by-doing process of editing radio news stories. The
student writes the news-scripts based on predetermined scenarios in preparation for
their-in-computer edit and voicing. Embedded in the scenarios are
predetermined journalistic and linguistic outcomes which fit into the notions of news
design and news presentation inappropriate broadcast cultural language. Student
responses can then be submitted to the lecturer, either by email or by hard copy,
subedited by the lecturer and returned with feedback.

The pack, built on the CD-ROM Game platform provides a built-in and standardized
student centered learning environment for intense simulation of the working culture of
radio journalism. We decided the package should also provide an on-line capability
that would seamlessly connect to the course coordinator for feedback and fast
turnaround of subbed student news scripts. Where the on-line capability for filing their assignments
was absent, the student have the option to access the alternative, albeit slower forms of
submitting assignments and receiving feedback through fax and mailing hard copy.

The Broadcasting Journalism course is also offered by distance education through the
Open University of Hong Kong. Despite Hong Kong's techno-rich first world capability,
many Hong Kong students, like those in Australia, had no on-line capabilities for
distance learning. Of those with on-line computers, most worked with organizations
providing the on-line capability as part of their work for the firm. Perhaps
much misunderstood is that many students in Hong Kong cannot afford to own their
own personal home computers. Some who do have a machine at home, endured delays and
expense in connecting on-line or having repairs done to an already resource draining
personal computer.
Radio-Edit Suite - The Cee Dee Way

Our CD-ROM Radio Edit Suite will be used on an experimental basis. It is planned that the CD ROM will form the base of our open learning delivery down the track, thus making it available cheaply to students at home and overseas whenever they have the required mid-range computers.

Currently, we practise what we call an 'integrated multimedia learning' environments, where apart from conventional printed reading materials and video tapes, we encourage students to interact with us and their colleagues by electronic mail (via discussion groups, or media centers, sited in our Home Page).

Drawing from a grant (Educational Strategic Development Funds), and in response to what we had learnt over the on-line delivery of our course through the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS), we set about building a subject delivery with reliable "interactivity" that delivered multimedia resources and did not rely on paper, but could be reprinted on paper for screen shy readers. The delivery platform had to be in a form that would be more stable, more reliable and faster than the former on-line versions.

Secondly, our rationale for building a CD-ROM platform is that our students were more likely to have a CD ROM reader on their computer than a modem connection for on-line delivery. Unlike the on-line environment, the CD ROM package could carry a selection of our most educationally dynamic video grabs, making them available as the student reads the text.

We deemed that our instructional design should provide interactivity and speed in the navigation throughout the multi-media reference points. We also wanted to avoid the little postage stamp video clips of CD ROM products to date.

By 1998 it was possible to use Quicktime 3 movies with images and sound that were sharp and readable and ran at 17 frames per second rather than the gyrations of the older CD ROM 12 frame per second on screen movies. Extra powerful compression gave ten minutes of video crammed into around 200 megabytes. We provided a Netscape environment so the course looked like it was on-line and, at times, it could be. Like the whole product, the transitions, from the CD ROM to the on-line context, needed to remain seamless and fast.
Looking at the selection of subjects within the Graduate School's repertoire. Broadcasting Journalism was at that time, the most suitable and ready for developing into a CD ROM platform. The subject was complete, it had no major design and rewriting changes. Most importantly, its shape and structure of interactive learning processes already fitted with what the CD ROM offered.

The Broadcasting Journalism course works through the student navigating linguistically designed exercises which are based on actual SBS scenarios. The objective -- to write journalism in appropriate radio form, write for the genre, determine news worthiness with an informed approach, finding the crisis point of a story so that it may be appropriately used in the lead. This product was positioning itself as an exciting idea for a world market.

The educational Broadcasting Journalism CD ROM should not only provide instruction and simulation in writing for radio but should acknowledge the technology that is revolutionizing the production of all sound; in this case, sound employed in the presentation of radio news and current affairs.

The CD ROM exploration should by nature of its design, converge technologies through the portable, non linear, digital audio edit suite. The digital sound revolution is forcing the radio journalist and programmer to self operate. They cut and produce their own stories. The CD ROM simulated radio station would employ the audio editing suite as a sort of field tool that is always there for students, as radio journalists, to navigate the layers of the course. It provides access to numerous and exciting current affairs audio clips that are available for constructing fresh radio news stories with student voice-over and spin.

The object of the process is that the player, the news editor, beats all competing radio broadcast networks to the satellite with the edited news scoop of the day. It would also be possible, we thought, that scenarios built in could provide the player (the student journalist editor), with specific assignments to fulfill. For instance, a typical edited and finished radio news piece about the politics of conflict in the remote and last frontier, Irian Jaya, not only must be edited according to rules and conventions of radio news and journalism, but it must be filed to the satellite before the competitors while the story aspires to being the most successful in audience terms - the most dramatic and revealing of international stories on the event.
In another scenario, we envisaged the studentjournalist editor being assigned a travel news story that provided a review and critique of a recent radio documentary series on Africa. While considering newsworthy tests and using the grabs provided, the student cuts a 1 minute arts news story on the screening of the travel adventure series, using audio available to the story as radio grabs.

Future versions of the software could provide response analysis showing typical global audience response, revealing that students cut the most dramatic and revealing of all the stories filed and containing the best lead and supporting par combination, the most appropriate grabs in legal and ethical terms while considering multicultural sensitivities.

The outcome of successfully filing edited stories is that the player will very quickly learn the basics of radiojournalism through editing and sequencing through a virtual radio based on-line editing system.

In design and development, this model of interactive learning is governed, as Cunningham asserts, by the following:

- practical issues - including questions of cost, intellectual property, core business, and student access;
- pedagogical issues - including questions of education versus training, the effect of technology on learning, and cultural differences in learning styles;
- policy issues - primarily to do with accreditation and consumer protection from poor quality 'diploma mills', and with the possibility of allowing overseas private providers access to public higher education funds;

In defining the power of the Radio Edit Suite, it can be looked at as an entertainment based, arts and mass media industry relevant tool -- a self contained, radio news and current affairs, nonlinear cutting station with built-in information on how to work within the international English language conventions, or it might be defined as simply a video game based on the culture of radio journalism.

Radio Edit Suite's Windows or Macintosh environment offers a virtual radio station with the rights and internationally relevant legal documentation to enable access to exciting audio clips filed by foreign correspondents from around the world.
The virtual radio station simulates today’s pacy digital radio reality with its blurred boundaries between news and advertising. The CD ROM enclosesures that the radio editor must cut to deadlines and entertainment standards that networks and audiences demand. The editor cuts radio to current entertainment values while steering through minefields of radio glamour, money driven advertising and public relations double speak.

Deep in the CD ROM based course, media lawyers and ethicists are eager to play their part in the glamorous and addictive environment of the mass news media, by saying how you should cut your story. They advise on the legal and ethical traps in production while academics warn of the hidden agendas held by network bosses and mediabarons. Both the informed journalist and beginning community radio programmer will use Radio Edit Suite to provide News-Media Game Theory simulation. The roles, rules, rituals, language and conventions of radio news and current affairs is built into the culture of the software. It responds to the decisions and interaction of the player in terms of real industry parameters determined by SBS and ABC Radio in Australia and RTHK in Hong Kong.

The CD ROM based package will be custom built to suit particular markets; specific radio cultures, specific media laws, languages and rules. These known parameters, built into the software, define the environment of world radio news and current affairs. The course responds to the emerging internationally-based form, practice, guidelines and conventions of radio journalism, and so a standard CD ROM package will inform the player as they work through the exercises.

Conclusion

Borderless online learning market is segmenting with more demand from 25 year olds and onwards. There is demand for an education that provides opportunities and tools for career change through post-graduate research and coursework. In turn, government and industry depend on these learned workers. Thus, there must be carefully planned approaches to the way technology is integrated into teaching and learning processes. It is important to balance the raw forces of straight out hardsell seduction by new technology providers with the notion that technology will provide the much needed renaissance to education. Eventually, technology may even provide the solution for cost-effective and fair flexible delivery which will bring the price of further education down.
An attitude in academic circles is that the traditional lecture is still the best mode of delivery and that the new forms will fade once the seduction power declines. The rapid changing and fragmentation of these markets continue to subvert attempts to generalize the centrality of NCTs to borderless mass markets. Technological 'solutions' will always have to be developed and articulated within and through local cultural screens before being used in 'global' or 'borderless' education. These trials and pre-cursors should include considerations around "accreditation, cultural expectations and differences, and delivery issues". 11

Teaching and learning in a Confucian heritage culture like Hong Kong can be as dysfunctional a process as it is in any Western environment such as in Australia. However, through the flexible, distance, multi-media and exercise/game-based delivery method, the disciplined student from any culture will be able to perform through engaging in repetitive memorizing tasks. Learning through the necessity to perform in repetitive exposure to tasks and simulations leads not to an end in itself but to the necessary prerequisites to creativity.

This democratically feasible education can be offered through niche or specialist universities. The idea is that the whole degree appears as an individual form, local in content and identity but international in relevance. However, through borderless education, the degree is studied through components, available anywhere in the world and offered through different educational providers or corporations from around the world.

If it works, it's obsolete. I used to say. But I heard a new slogan recently that appears to be perfect for this new economy: "Welcome to the future - it's broken."

This is not said in a tone of despair but in a bright, happy voice. Being broken is more productive. The difference between being productive and wasting time is disappearing, and we are returning to a pre-industrial configuration. Businesses that imagine themselves to be efficiently pursuing their goals will wake up one day and find themselves utterly alone, profitless, and broke. This explains the current "merger mania." The idea of "synergy" is illusionary. What these huge companies are really after in combining is inefficiency.
That's why the Net is the premier invention of the digital era. It is not about finding anything. It is about superfluous connections and wasting time. As you know, only the young, the primitive, and the eccentric waste time. That is why all the most useful inventions come from them. They are not bound to be productive, and can thus waste time pursuing the unpromising to find the truly new. The efficiency of the machine age cannot discover anything worthwhile now.1

Endnotes:

1 We have chosen to use the term "open learning" rather than the traditional term "distance learning" as we consider time, space and distance to be antithetical to online communication technology. "Open learning" is also a preferred term of reference as it essentially implies offering students a wider choice of access and control over the contents, their learning outcomes, pace of study and nature of assessment.

2 We offer a two-year Master of Journalism in Hong Kong through the Open University of Hong Kong where residential classes are conducted twice a semester. Students are encouraged to interact with us via emails. They have the option of submitting their assignments via the email. Normal process is for students to submit their written hard copy assignments to OUHK which will then despatch to us in UOW. Assessed assignments are then returned to the students via OUHK. Specifically, OUHK acts as UOW's coordinator in Hong Kong.


4. Cunningham et al. 1998 in Cunningham, S. op. cit. "Technology and delivery: Assessing the impact of new media on borderless education. Australian Universities' Review - New media and borderless education. Vol.41:1, 1998. Publisher: National Tertiary Educators Union. [In a project funded by DEETYA in 1997 through its Evaluations and Investigations (EIP) program, a QUT-based research team interviewed more than 140 people who it identified as 'key players' from government, industry, the mass media and higher education in 10 countries in Asia, Europe, North America and Australia. "It was a global mapping exercise - the first intensive effort to go beyond rhetoric and analyse the reality......"]

5. We use this term with the assumption that the CD-ROM mode of delivery has not been widely used in delivering post-graduate education to off-campus students. We do recognise that what is 'alternative' can become increasingly mainstream with time.

**Note from Wired:** Scholars agree thatMarshall McLuhan's earliest books were written by him, but there is mystery and uncertainty about who really wrote his subsequent works. McLuhan would lie on a couch, head on a pillow, and spout ideas, for hours. Sometimes assistants would transcribe as McLuhan dictated, sometimes they would later write down what McLuhan had said, and sometimes they would write down what they thought McLuhan had said. Somehow books were assembled from these notes and recollections, and then McLuhan signed his name to them. This indefinite manner of creation was never a problem for McLuhan, who often insisted that facts were not as important as fallacies.

The fallacies of this interview with McLuhan areas follows: About a year ago, someone calling himself Marshall McLuhan began posting anonymously on a popular mailing list called Zone(zonc@wired.com). Gary Wolf began a correspondence with the poster via a chain of anonymous remailers. McLuhan (who would have been 85 this year) said he now lives in a beach town in Southern California named "Parma." (This town does not exist.) One after another, tiny hints, confirmed by third parties close to McLuhan decades ago, convinced Wolf that if the poster was not McLuhan himself, it was programmed with an eerie command of McLuhan's life and inimitable perspective. After many rounds of e-mail, the conversation got down to the meat of the matter: What does McLuhan think about all this new digitall technology?


12. Gary Wolf(gary@wired.com) is the executive editor of HotWired. He and Michael Stein are the authors of *Aether Madness: An Off-Beat Guide to the Online World*. 