Rowing Alone: Technology and Democracy in the Humanities Classroom

Paul Schacht

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Paul Schacht, State University of New York at Geneseo, NY, UNITED STATES

Abstract: American colleges and universities are engaged in a renewed effort to educate students for democratic citizenship. Faculty in the humanities have both a cultural and a professional interest in being part of this effort, and the digital revolution has enhanced their ability to do so. Social computing can foster civic pedagogies - learning practices that develop skills of democratic participation - and digital technology has spawned civic issues, such as the purpose of copyright, that cannot be fully analyzed without the concepts and vocabulary of the humanities. But to take advantage of the new pedagogical opportunities offered by technology, and to lead intelligent discussion of the new issues raised by it, humanists must overcome their present digital illiteracy.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Digital Technology, Social Computing, Wiki, Collaborative Learning, Democracy, Community, Pedagogy, Literature, Copyright, Culture

IN ITS 2006 report on cyberinfrastructure in the humanities and social sciences, titled *Our Cultural Commonwealth*, the American Council of Learned Societies identified the "conservative culture" of humanities scholarship as one of the challenges to building the robust "layer of expertise . . . best practices, standards, tools, collections, and collaborative environments" that will be needed to carry on humanities scholarship in the digital future (23, 6). A year earlier, in the pages of the journal *New Literary History*, Jerome McGann put the case more bluntly: "We're illiterate," he told his fellow humanists, and "digital illiteracy puts us on the margin of conversations and actions that affect the center of our cultural interests (as citizens) and our professional interests (as scholars and educators)" (72).

I wish to explore the territory where McGann's two centers of interest—cultural and professional—overlap. For educators in the humanities have both a cultural and a professional interest in helping to produce the next generation of democratic citizens. Although McGann's focus is on humanities scholarship, the point about digital illiteracy holds equally well for humanities pedagogy. The digital revolution has given humanities educators new tools for teaching crucial skills of citizenship, and it has spawned issues affecting the future of democracy that cannot be fully analyzed without the concepts and vocabulary of the humanities. To the extent that digital illiteracy prevents humanists from using these tools and exploring these issues, it keeps them from realizing the full civic benefit of their professional practice.

To illustrate the potential of digital technology to advance a humanities pedagogy that is simultaneously a civic pedagogy—one that requires students to employ and hone the skills needed for active participation in a democracy—I will draw on my own classroom practice as it has evolved under the influence of the interactive tools commonly referred to as "Web 2.0." To illustrate the relevance of the humanities to civic issues raised by the digital revolution, I will look briefly at both the broad debate over technology's impact on citizenship itself and the narrower debate over intellectual property and copyright.

Before doing either, however, I must say more about my premise that humanities educators can and should be in the business of educating citizens. Although a full justification of that premise lies beyond the scope of this essay, a brief reply to each of three possible objections to it is relevant to my purpose.

First, there is the objection that educating citizens is an enterprise altogether extrinsic to higher education, the real purpose of which is to teach students the particular methods of particular disciplines. Second, there is the objection that "educating citizens" is merely a euphemism for political indoctrination. Third, there is the objection that even if educating citizens is a legitimate aim of higher education generally, it has little relevance to the humanities in particular, since the humanities as a disciplinary area are ill suited to the project.

Stanley Fish articulates the first objection well when he writes that the aim of educating citizens, if undertaken in earnest, "would deform (by replacing) the true task of academic work: the search for truth and the dissemination of it through teaching" ("Why We Built the Ivory Tower"). The best answer to this objection is that the "true task of academic work" is

a matter for debate. Certainly there are no historical grounds to regard the academy's true aim as an austerely value-neutral search for and dissemination of the truth.[1] Meanwhile, there are logical reasons to reject this aim, one of which is that all educational methods involve a politically-inflected normative conception of the properly educated student, so that neutrality with respect to values and politics is impossible.

This turns out to be the best reply to the second objection, that education for citizenship is a form of indoctrination. Indoctrination requires that the political values to be instilled remain unarticulated or unexamined—a more likely outcome when their very existence is denied than when they are brought to light and subjected to public debate. In short, indoctrination is an educational abuse attached not to this or that aim of the academy but to the way it attempts to realize its aim, and the best defense against it may be to teach the civic value of relentlessly interrogating values.[2]

The third objection, that the humanities as a discipline are ill suited to education for citizenship, underscores the potential benefit, both to students and to humanists, of doing more to incorporate digital technology, both as tool and as object of study, into the humanities classroom. First, although the humanities may not have much to contribute to public discussion of such social problems as crime, discrimination, and inequality, they can (and do) contribute invaluably to public discussion of problems that lie at the intersection of politics, morality, selfhood, and imagination. The digital revolution has introduced a number of such problems—including the future of citizenship and of civic space, and the ownership of culture—that the current generation of students will need help in facing. Second, although the humanities do not lend themselves as readily as, say, the natural and social sciences to certain kinds of civic learning, such as community-based projects or service learning, they lend themselves exceptionally well to the development of fundamental skills and dispositions crucial to democratic citizenship, such as the ability to think critically and to work collaboratively.[3] Digital technology provides the means for developing some of these skills and dispositions—particularly those associated with collaborative work—more intentionally and thus more effectively. Finally, although some areas of humanistic study, such as literature and the arts, hold a self-conception that orients them away from collaborative projects and the search for public truths in favor of highly personalized expressions of creativity or insight, it is possible that this self-conception is inadequate. Indeed, to the extent that digital technology might prompt humanities scholars to re-conceive their own subject matter and their own work in ways that expose the communal nature of interpretation and emphasize the value of scholarly collaboration, it holds the promise of educating not only citizens but the humanities themselves.[4]

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[1] The authors of *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* argue that the "ivory tower" model of the academy reflects the twin influences of the German university system and mid-twentieth century philosophical trends divorcing science from values in education (Colby 23). In the United States, "Educators of earlier periods considered knowledge, morality, and civic action to be thoroughly interconnected and believed that higher education should promote them as mutually reinforcing aspects of preparation for life" (26). The "legacy of the American Revolution to the American college," writes Frederick Rudolph, included "a wide belief that the colleges were now serving a new responsibility to a new nation: the preparation of young men for responsible citizenship . . ." (*American College* 40).

[2] In "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," Westheimer and Kahne display the kind of critical self-consciousness that students, faculty, and administrators must collectively exercise if the aim of educating citizens is to avoid the perils of indoctrination. They analyze how the choice among three different approaches to preparing students for democratic citizenship is itself a political one, since the three approaches embody three different conceptions of the ideal democratic citizen.

[3] This is not to suggest that humanistic study cannot or should not be coupled with community action. The Arts of Citizenship program at the University of Michigan offers one model of fruitful combination; the program fosters campus-community partnerships that "enrich civic life by creating public cultural goods that preserve our past, tell stories of who we are, imagine our future, and provide public space for connecting with each other" (*Arts of Citizenship*). But despite calls such as Ellen Cushman's for "Service Learning as the New English Studies," "Core humanistic disciplines like philosophy, history, and literary studies have contributed relatively little to the movement's growth and increasing sophistication. Indeed, literary studies may be the least well represented of all the more common academic disciplines" ("Humanistic Learning" 89). When it comes to literary studies in particular, Laurie Grobman may have hit on one reason for humanists' caution: she found that the students in one of her own literary service-learning experiments tended to mine the literature for answers and explanations, as if it corresponded in a one-to-one relation with life" ("Is There a Place…?" 135). In other words, to treat literature as a sourcebook for addressing social ills risks encouraging the naïve attitude that literature simply mirrors reality—an attitude that professors of literature must already work hard to overcome. Other obstacles to humanistic service learning are thoughtfully explored in Shutz and Gere. It may be possible to overcome these obstacles, but in the meantime humanists should keep in mind that community involvement is not the only means of educating for democracy. In a 1947 study of 27 Michigan high schools that the modern civic engagement movement would do well to revisit, Theral T. Herrick identified "creative cooperation between students and teachers," "contributions from the experiences of the student," and "individual conclusions and evaluations submitted to the judgment of the group" as examples of "democratic instructional techniques" through which students can develop citizenship skills within the classroom (*School Patterns* 52). (Herrick also helped direct a 1953 educational film, *Practicing Democracy in the Classroom*, designed to illustrate such techniques. The occasional flights of Cold War rhetoric in both the book and the film, and their sponsorship by the Daughters of the American Revolution, belie their radical call for an active, egalitarian, and social pedagogy.)

[4] As Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford observe in "Collaboration and Concepts of Authorship," decades of nuanced humanistic theorizing about "the author" as a misleading social construct have produced little change in the way humanistic scholarship is actually produced,

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I turn now to my own experience using social computing as an instructional tool, as an instance of how this tool can advance certain elements of humanities pedagogy that serve civic ends by foregrounding these elements for instructor and students alike. Social computing is not a necessity for achieving this goal but a stimulus and an aid, so powerful a stimulus and so useful an aid that humanities educators who cannot or will not use it deny themselves and their students something of real value.

The elements of humanities pedagogy I have in mind are those that encourage students to think of themselves, and act, as members of a community. "A democracy is more than a form of government," wrote Dewey in 1916; "it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (*Democracy* 83). The title of a more recent volume, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, implies a similar perspective. Yet it is a common complaint among educators that many of today's students "do not view themselves primarily as members of a 'community of learners' but rather as consumers who wish to get their training and credentials as easily, quickly, and cheaply as possible" (Colby 38). Pedagogical practices that reconcile community effort and individual gain, rather than treating them as mutually exclusive alternatives, present a challenge to students' consumerist self-image, especially when the practices themselves are accompanied by explicit reflection on them. Re-orienting students' self-conception from "consumer" to "community member" is one way to make undergraduate education a "powerful preexpedition" for a life of participatory citizenship (38).

In fall, 1998 the syllabus I drew up for "The Practice of Criticism," my English department's introduction to literary analysis and theory, carried, as an epigraph, the American philosopher and literary critic Kenneth Burke's description of humanity's "unending conversation" about itself:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending on the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (Burke 109)

At the beginning of that semester, I explained to my students why Burke's description perfectly captured their role and mine as interlocutors in a narrower "unending conversation" about literature. I liked the way this idea of criticism-as-conversation framed the course and underscored the need for everyone to participate actively in class discussion.

The following spring, I experimented for the first time with electronic discussion forums. I hoped that the forums would help me drive home the relationship between our miniature critical community and the larger one invoked by Burke. They did that and more. They also caused me to rethink the relationship itself.

The physical conversation in my classroom, I came to see, was an emulation, a re-creation, of Burke's virtual conversation, which was for its part an emulation or re-creation of intimate, face-to-face dialogue. Insofar as my parlor-classroom represented a return to the origins of critical discourse—real people talking to each other in real time—it also represented a turning away from the asynchronous mode of actual scholarly and critical communication, which mostly happens in the virtual parlor of books, scholarly journals, and magazines. Thus, to the extent that my students' online discussion forums represented a turning away from the intimacy of live conversation, they represented an opportunity to speak to each other as real scholars and critics do: in virtual space, with an eye toward defining terms, choosing the right word, documenting claims with quotations, and respecting the demands of logical reasoning. For years, of course, I had given my students just this kind of opportunity through essay assignments and exams, but with two crucial differences: their writing

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published, credited, and rewarded. Academic publishers and institutions of higher learning ironically continue to reinforce the very notion of the scholar as solitary genius that scholars themselves have sought to discredit. Ede and Lunsford briefly discuss digital archives as an example of collaborative scholarship, but they do not explore the potential of social computing to make humanists and their students rethink what the humanities do. However, that potential is at the heart of the IVANHOE project at the University of Virginia, "an online collaborative playspace [that] exposes the indeterminacy of humanities texts to role-play and performative intervention" (IVANHOE). "Traditional interpretation," notes Jerome McGann in his explanation of the project, "is itself best understood as a set of reflective activities and hence as something that lays itself open to active responses from others. It is not so much that 'all interpretation is misinterpretation', as Harold Bloom observed some 25 years ago, as that all interpretation pursues transformations of meaning within a dynamic space of inherited and ongoing acts of interpretation. Interpretation is a dialogical exchange and, ultimately, a continuous set of collaborative activities" ("Education in a New Key").

on essays and exams was produced for an audience of one (me), and it was undertaken as an occasional effort (perhaps two essays and two exams per semester) rather than as a steady practice.

I began using electronic discussion forums in all my courses, requiring every student in every course to engage in conversation about a question that I would post the day before every class meeting. Then, in 2001, came Wikipedia. Wikis opened the door to a completely different kind of virtual parlor, and they opened my eyes to yet another dimension of the classroom as community.

In fall, 2005 I began requiring my students to contribute to a wiki that I named "The Collaborative Writing Project."[5] My original notion was to put the text of a poem on one page of the wiki and have my students link particular words and phrases of the poem to other pages on which they would offer interpretive commentary. The result would differ from their electronic forums by being organized around the object of discussion—the poem—rather than discussion threads. The wiki's virtual parlor would be like a room in a museum, its inhabitants like a group of visitors discussing a painting or sculpture immediately before them. To make an interpretive contribution to the discussion would be, in Burke's phrase, to "put in your oar." (The mixed metaphor of boats in a parlor apparently did not worry Burke and does not bother me.) The conversation constituted by the students' contributions would remain permanently on the Web, where each semester's new latecomers to the party would find it, try to make sense of it, and eventually join it.

But I quickly discovered that my students were less inclined to move their own boats about in the water than to cooperate in propelling a single vessel. They tended to annotate the poetry on the wiki with background information rather than with analysis. They preferred elucidating the poetry to interpreting it, sharing the fruits of research to articulating an individual perspective. Annotating poetry interested them less altogether than writing in one voice to produce a Wikipedia-like article about a poem. They liked rowing together better than rowing alone.

For the first time it struck me that Burke's metaphor does not capture the kind of rowing together that is in fact one mode of activity—an important one, too—in the world of professional literary scholarship, as evidenced by the production of variorum and other scholarly editions, by the compiling of handbooks and checklists, by the building of archives, or—increasingly—by the creation and development of digital resources (ACLS; MLA 43-47). My students' preference for rowing together over rowing alone revealed to me that the kind of Burkean

community I had been striving to create in my classes still prized the individual over the common good.

I now noticed that even the learning outcomes for my courses had an individualistic bent. My outcomes for The Practice of Criticism, for example, were these:

Students in English 170 will:

- be able to interpret and analyze works of literature in accordance with the major conventions of literary criticism;
- be able to produce short essays in literary criticism that adhere to the conventions of critical writing;
- have a rudimentary understanding of how literary theory shapes the practice of criticism.

These outcomes specified only what each student *as an individual* would know or be able to do by the end of the course; they said nothing about what the class *as a community* would accomplish. So the next time I taught the course, I labeled my original set of outcomes "individual outcomes" and added to them a set of "community" outcomes, as follows:

The Engl 170 (Spring 2006) community will:

- produce new knowledge (new for this community) about the nature of literature and literary criticism;
- share knowledge about literature and literary criticism in accordance with scholarly conventions;
- discuss and debate ideas about individual literary works and about the nature of literature and literary criticism in ways that respect the diversity of the community.

I do not know that these are precisely the right outcomes for a literary studies class that wishes to act as a community. I do know that adopting them, however imperfect or incomplete they may be, changed the way I taught the course. For example, I began trying to think of ways to make knowledge production (or at least knowledge aggregation) a real activity of the class. In previous semesters, I had required every student to keep and periodically turn in a notebook in which basic literary terms—alliteration, metonymy, etc.—were defined and illustrated with examples from our readings. I transformed this exercise from an individual to a communal endeavor by moving it to the wiki as a "Dictionary of Literary Terms" and asking students to build the dictionary cooperatively.

Adopting these outcomes also gave me a way to clarify for my students (not to mention myself) how

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[5] In my essay "The Collaborative Writing Project," I describe this wiki's origin and development in more detail. I conceived and named the project in complete innocence of the considerable body of scholarship on collaborative writing, including the work of Ede and Lunsford.

the skills they were developing in the literature classroom might serve them in the wider arena of civic life. For democracy like scholarship is an ongoing project that requires and engenders both conversation and cooperation, rowing alone and rowing together. I row alone when I advocate a position, exercising my constitutional right to "speak my mind," to "have my say" on a matter of importance to the community. I row with others when I contribute to building the shared understanding of social reality against the background of which my fellow citizens and I speak our minds as individuals. Rowing alone and rowing together are not, of course, two pure and distinctive modes of activity. I may and largely do speak my mind *for the sake of* building shared understanding—whether of social reality or simply of a poem. Nor does the difference between rowing alone and rowing together turn simply on whether I am sole author or co-author of my words: writing a signed article for an encyclopedia looks more like collaboration than conversation; helping to draft a party platform is a way to "have my say" along with like-minded individuals (those who, in Burke's parlor allegory, represent my allies in the conversation). The difference between rowing alone and rowing together might best be described as a difference in the speaker's or speakers' principal orientation—towards self-assertion on the one hand or cooperation on the other. Borrowing the language of speech-act theory, we might hang the difference on which of these two actions the speaker or speakers' words are mainly intended to, or mainly do, *perform* (Austin 6-7). Students who learn to choose intelligently between these two actions, and to perform both of them competently, are gaining valuable preparation for citizenship.

Technology as Topic

The literature classroom is not only a place where social computing can help students develop skills for citizenship by helping them understand and practice the difference between two kinds of speech-act. It is also a place where computer technology itself can and should be scrutinized for its impact on democracy. The general social impact of science and technology is a familiar theme in humanities courses. It would require only a sharpening of focus to bring digital technology's particular impact on civic life into view.

In "The Renewal of Civic Virtue and the Difference Technology Makes," Ian Barns asserts that "To a large extent, the current 'informationalizing' of late modern social life (in the establishment of computer networks and media and communication infrastructure) is driven by the regulatory interests of the corporate world and the administrative state" (181).

He predicts that "notwithstanding the constructive possibilities arising out of particular technologies (for example, the increased productivity made possible by biotechnology and the democratic and participatory potential of the Internet), the overall cultural momentum of technological development will be to weaken further the kind of selfhood necessary for engaged citizenship and, hence, to destroy the conditions necessary for the cultivation of civic virtue" (182).

But contrast Barns's pessimistic view with that offered by Yochai Benkler in *The Wealth of Networks*:

> The networked information economy . . . allows for the emergence of a more critical and self-reflective culture. In the past decade, a number of legal scholars—Niva Elkin Koren, Terry Fisher, Larry Lessig, and Jack Balkin—have begun to examine how the Internet democratizes culture. Following this work and rooted in the deliberative strand of democratic theory, I suggest that the networked information environment offers us a more attractive cultural production system in two distinct ways: (1) it makes culture more transparent, and (2) it makes culture more malleable. Together, these mean that we are seeing the emergence of a new folk culture—a practice that has been largely suppressed in the industrial era of cultural production—where many more of us participate actively in making cultural moves and finding meaning in the world around us. These practices make their practitioners better "readers" of their own culture and more self-reflective and critical of the culture they occupy, thereby enabling them to become more self-reflective participants in conversations within that culture. This also allows individuals much greater freedom to participate in tugging and pulling at the cultural creations of others, "glomming on" to them, as Balkin puts it, and making the culture they occupy more their own than was possible with mass-media culture. In these senses, we can say that culture is becoming more democratic: self-reflective and participatory. (15)

Which of these views is right? For the purpose of educating students to be responsible citizens, of course, exploring the question matters more than finding the answer. For the purpose of exploring the question intelligently, ideas central to the humanities—"culture" and "reading," to name two mentioned by Benkler —matter as much as those derived from sociology and political theory.

The transformations being wrought by the Internet have generated intense public discussion of the economic and legal regime under which our access to

and use of culture are currently regulated. The humanities classroom is the perfect place for students to begin dipping their oars into such questions as the purpose of copyright in a free society and the function of government in maintaining the availability of culture as a public good. The novelist Mark Helprin has advocated copyright protection in perpetuity for "works of the spirit and the mind" ("A Great Idea"). His understanding of art as intellectual property from which the artist deserves to profit recalls the case for international copyright made by Charles Dickens in the 1840's. (". . . I do not see," Dickens told an audience in Connecticut, ". . . why fame, besides playing the *reveille* for which she is so justly celebrated, should not blow out of her trumpet a few notes of a different kind from those with which she has hitherto contented herself" [qtd. in Welsh 32]). Helprin poses the question this way: "Would it not be just and fair for those who try to extract a living from the uncertain arts of writing and composing to be freed from a form of confiscation not visited upon anyone else?" Yet Lawrence Lessig and others have argued against conflating works of imagination with tangible property, insisting not only on the inherent differences between them but also on the historical wrong turn represented by twentieth-century laws and judicial decisions surrounding copyright, a turn, they maintain, that departed radically from the public purpose of copyright envisioned by the Constitution—to "promote the progress of science and useful arts," not to protect profit—and that transformed a "read-write" culture into a "read-only" one (Lessig, *Free Culture* and "Read-Write"; "Against"). One must ask what would have been the consequence for culture if Sophocles had had to pay for the rights to the Oedipus story, or Shakespeare for the rights to that of Romeo and Juliet, assuming that in an intellectual property regime they would have been permitted to use these stories at all. Lessig reminds us that Walt Disney, whose corporate namesake so fiercely guards its property in Mickey Mouse, rose to fame and wealth largely by recycling culture in the public domain, such as the fairytales of the Grimm Brothers (*Free Culture* 21-25).

On the question of copyright, as on the question of computer technology's overall impact on culture, humanities faculty should make it their aim not to supply answers but to frame and guide intelligent discussion. They are singularly positioned to do this precisely because they have devoted their careers to the study of such concepts as "imagination" and "authorship." Needless to say, they will do it best if both they and their students have also lived these concepts as practice under the new conditions that the digital revolution has created.

Conclusion

In a recent book review seeking to "take the . . . temperature" of academic literature departments by examining the Modern Language Association's quarterly Job Information List, William Deresiewicz of Yale University finds that "the major trend now" in literary criticism is "trendiness itself, trendism, the desperate search for anything sexy" ("Professing Literature in 2008"). He caps a list of examples that includes "global lit," "ecocriticism," and "fantasy literature" by noting drily that there is "even . . . something called 'digital humanities.'"

Between the ACLS report's announcement of a profound transformation in the accumulation, storage, organization, dissemination, and culture of knowledge, and Deresiewicz's casually quizzical dismissal of the small but growing effort to reap the benefits of that transformation for humanistic study, the chasm could not be wider.

In exploring the conservative disposition that its authors regard as one reason for many humanists' resistance or at least indifference to the digital revolution, the ACLS report notes that "single-author work continues to dominate" humanities scholarship. "Humanists," one academic administrator told the authors, "tend to be more focused on individual theorizing and communicating of ideas and information about their disciplines. Technology is not seen as a necessary, let alone a required, tool for collaboration in the humanities the way it is in the sciences" (21).

In other words, as much as humanistic scholarship depends on rowing together, it still gives pride of place to the scholar who rows alone. The "tradition . . . of the 'individual genius'" (21) or at least of the individual interpretation—evident among other places in Burke's metaphor—causes humanists to undervalue the kind of collective enterprise that might draw them to technology as an enabling tool. The other side of this coin, however, is that embracing technology might cause humanists to discover exciting new possibilities for collaborative work and thus to re-evaluate its importance to the discipline, even its centrality to the enterprise of interpretation itself.

The ACLS report does not consider another kind of conservatism that pervades the humanities. Many humanists seem to harbor a deep suspicion of science and the machine as agents of "progress," a suspicion that dates back at least to the era of *Frankenstein*. From the romantic period to the present day, men and women of letters have seen themselves as conservators of the human in a world become increasingly mechanized, atomized, and instrumentalized by the conjunction of science, industry, and capitalism.

The keynote of this conservatism was perhaps most memorably struck toward the end of the nine-

teenth century by William Morris, who declared that, "Apart from the desire to produce beautiful things, the leading passion of my life has been and is hatred of modern civilisation" (Briggs 36). Morris's complaint was really much narrower than that broad language implies: like his intellectual mentors Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin, and like his kindred spirit Charles Dickens, he hated not all modernity but the juggernaut of unfettered industrial capitalism, rolling on in its dead indifference to tear both individual humans and the social body limb from limb (Thompson 22-39).

One frequently hears technology-averse faculty in the humanities describe themselves as "Luddites," but this historical allusion is inapt; there is nothing in the average humanist's experience to match the severe economic hardship and brutal class oppression that marked the lot of these early nineteenth-century practitioners of direct political action. It is the cultural critics of early capitalism who are the real ancestors of today's technology-resistant humanists. Like their predecessors, these humanists express concern over the profound economic disruptions caused by a new set of productive capacities; like them, they also worry deeply about the broad consequences of those capacities for the social fabric, and in particular about their potentially ominous implications for such matters as autonomy, privacy, community, and democracy.

Both the economic and the social concerns are legitimate. However, these concerns do not really arise from technology *per se* but from the ownership, control, and use of technology, and avoidance of technology therefore does nothing to address them. Without the ability to understand the Internet thoroughly and use it capably, one can neither imagine its beneficial possibilities, nor argue persuasively about its destructive ones, nor advocate effectively the political and legal conditions necessary to promote the first and disarm the second.

We have seen that the conservatism that keeps some humanists in the dark about the Internet prevents them from realizing the full civic benefit of their professional practice—first, by denying them effective tools to prepare students for the "mode of associated living, [the] conjoint communicated experience" that is democracy, and second, by denying their students guidance in applying core humanistic concepts and categories—among them reading, imagination, authorship, and culture—to an understanding of the digital revolution. The inverse is true as well: such conservatism prevents humanists from realizing the full professional benefit of their civic practice by failing to ensure that students become citizens who value what the humanities can bring to democratic conversation about the digital future. It is as though humanists were content to lean against the wall of Burke's parlor, letting others dominate the evening's talk, and as though they saw no need to show their students how to preserve the humanities themselves as an important topic of conversation. It is as though they declined to row either alone or together, but were satisfied to drift with the current. It may be possible to stay afloat indefinitely this way. But the risk of drowning seems very real.

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About the Author

Dr. Paul Schacht
Paul Schacht is Associate Professor of English at the State University of New York at Geneseo, where since
1985 he has taught courses in Victorian literature, humanities, and writing. He holds an A.B. in English from
the University of Michigan (1976) and a Ph.D. in English and American Literature from Stanford University
(1984). His research interests include Victorian fiction and the use of digital pedagogies in literary study. He
has published on Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Mark Twain and has described his wiki, The Collab-
orative Writing Project, in the online book *Using Wiki in Education*.

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