

# OF HEATHENS, PERVERTS AND STALKERS: THE IMAGINED LEARNER IN MOOCS

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Debates about the form, formats, functions and futures of massive online open courses (MOOCs) have been for the most part generative in helping to shape new platforms of active learning. However, they generally give very little attention to the figure of the learner. Contemporary MOOC discourse and practice tend to assume a diverse, distributed user who only needs infrastructures for access and a certain level of digital literacy to become an active learner. Thus, both the proponents and critics of MOOCs promote the idea that building online and open courseware, supported by infrastructure growth, will automatically translate into an inclusive and diverse set of learners online.

In this essay, I suggest that our imagination of learner ‘diversity’ within the MOOC neglects the contested histories of how a learner is ‘made’. I shift the debate from ‘Who is a learner?’ to ‘Who gets to become a learner?’ to argue that the figure of the learner is subject to a massive infrastructure of policing, penalizing and punishment; that learning does not happen through quantified codes and protocols engineered towards finite intentions, but through affective and accidental relationships with the learning resources; and that the figure of the learner is subject to technologies of domination and protocols of control that are inflected with questions of gender and power. I propose that complicating and unpacking the figure of the learner helps us to realize the limitations of our imaginations of MOOCs and opens up the possibility of building new connected learning environments that can account for truly diverse users to become active learners.

## INTRODUCTION

We were just getting ready to march into the era of the MOOC (Pappano, 2012) when they were already announced as dead (Borden, 2014) or, at least, terminally and fatally flawed. The intense lifecycle of MOOCs can be characterized by two sets of debates. The first focuses on the ‘future of the university’ and universities’ attempts to extend their scope via digital tools, platforms and devices that enhance and augment the classroom and pedagogy as we historically understand them<sup>1</sup>. This has led to conversations about digital literacy<sup>2</sup>, digital fluency, infrastructures of learning (Agre, 2000)<sup>3</sup> and various policies that mandate the use of digital devices and practices in existing classrooms<sup>4</sup>. The second set of debates concentrates on the ‘University of the Future’. Arguing that the university is a

<sup>1</sup> See for example, Lee Ayers Schlosser and Michael R. Simonson (2006), who locate four different axes that are at the heart of distance learning: 1. the academic institution within which the programme is housed, which distinguishes it from ‘self-learning’; 2. the separation of the teacher from the student geographically and temporally; 3. asynchronous and distributed interaction between the different participants; and 4. availability of resources and the problems of relevance. These are all questions that the future of university based responses embody, where the original logic of the university is not questioned but actually sought to be extended.

<sup>2</sup> The series of blog posts around digital literacy at the digital media and learning portal HASTAC gives a very insightful range of issues involved in digital literacy ([www.hastac.org/tag/digital-literacy](http://www.hastac.org/tag/digital-literacy)).

<sup>3</sup> Philip Agre (2000) in ‘Infrastructure and Institutional Change in the Networked Society’, in *Information, Communication and Society*, provides a prophetic analysis of the ways in which the universities are going to change in order to accommodate for the new modes of learning and education.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Prensky, in *Teaching Digital Natives: Partnering for Real Learning* (2010), makes a strong argument for the need for new policies that emerge from the learning practices of digital natives in our traditional classrooms.

techno-social artefact that was constructed by the print-based technologies of information storing, sorting, retrieving, distribution and transmission, such arguments call for a radical reimagining of the form, format and function of the university (Kamenetz, 2010) as information becomes shaped by digital and networked conditions (Goldberg, 2011). When these two approaches intersect, they produce tense and conflicting conversations, drawn by different impulses and logics around the relationship between technology, education and learning. However, there are two presumptions that run across the discourse irrespective of the ideological and practical position: that, first, MOOCs open up learning and education possibilities for, secondly, diverse individuals who were otherwise excluded from learning because of different axes of discrimination and oppression. While the different stakeholders might not agree that MOOCs are a solution to all our fears about the ‘university in ruins’ (Reading, 1996) or that MOOCs are the beginning of all our learning problems of the future, there is a definite consensus that MOOCs invite an unprecedented diversity of students into their fold and open up new spaces of connectedness where learning can happen.

So strong is this idea of the ‘open’-as-connected that much of the discourse about MOOCs becomes structured around different models of openness, and critique often centres only on whether or not MOOCs have the ability and the capacity to exercise connective open learning principles. Hence, new interventions that are imagined with MOOCs as a reference point—from blended learning environments and flipped classrooms to small private online courses, or SPOCs (Shimbukoro, 2013) and distributed online collaborative courses (DOCCs)<sup>5</sup>—seldom question the principle that MOOCs open up a set of resources to a diverse learning community, with disagreement focusing primarily on issues such as the quality of learning (Gold, 2012), the protocols of education (Losh, 2014) the neoliberal pragmatism of institutions of higher education (Chun and Rhody, 2014) and changing methods for evaluating critical learning and thinking practices. In all these debates, there is a presumption that opening up learning resources leads to access to learning resources. Access to learning resources is unpacked only as a question of access to technology and the need to build more robust infrastructure. The growth of infrastructure and penetration of connected-access devices is seen as proof of a diverse set of learners engaging in active learning practices through open courses.

In many ways, the rhetoric equating openness with diversity follows Tim Berners-Lee’s (1989) proposal for the world wide web, where the internet was imagined as enabling a world of collaboration, consolidation and co-creation through the production of peer-to-peer communities of information exchange, unhindered by existing inequalities of access and power. This imaginary of the internet as the space for openness and diversity propels digital movements of connectivity and imagines a globally distributed, contextually separated and digitally diverse community of learners in MOOCs.

In this chapter, I argue that these notions of diversity and openness shape debate around online and connected learning to such an extent that all our focus remains on whether or not openness and diversity are achieved. In the process, there is a gloss over the techno-social, historically constructed subject in relation to technologies of learning. I am going to attempt to unpack this figure of the learner by producing three unusual prototypes of learning that do not feature very visibly in the MOOC discourse and, when they do, are imbued with such positivity that the larger histories of struggle and politics, of

<sup>5</sup> Distributed online collaborative courses are an experiment by the group Femtechnet that seeks to make feminist interventions for mentored and blended learning (<http://femtechnet.newschoo1.edu/docc2013/>).

domination and control, are forgotten. I draw these three prototypes from post-colonial history, from affect and media theory, and from cybernetics.

### THE HEATHEN WITH/OUT HISTORY

In 1835, in colonial India, Thomas Babington Macaulay, who was the first law member of the Governor-General's Council for 'British India', made a passionate plea to the committee for education in India about the need for English language education for the 'Hindoo Native' (Macaulay, 1835). Macaulay, arguing against spending British money on the promotion of native texts and knowledges, blithely established that, outside of poetry, there is a clear hierarchy in the knowledges produced in English and in the local languages of the native. In his 'Minute on Education', Macaulay wrote:

It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England.

For Macaulay, the native heathen was marked as a subject who has a past, but no history, and hence needs to be educated in English to become the collaborator for smooth administration. 'Macaulay's children' (*The Economist*, 2004), as they are often derisively known in India, became the first instance of 'learners'—a subjectivity that was produced by the bastardized technocracy of a colonial government uniting with the codes and codex of knowledge-making.

Before the learner could be introduced to the great works of Milton and Hume, however, Macaulay suggested that the learner needed to be made into a learner. He cited an example of Sanskrit and Arabic scholars who had spent over a decade developing expertise in those languages and literatures, supported by the British Government to be 'educated and maintained from childhood', and yet unable to find 'places of high dignity of emolument' in the administrative systems of British India. Macaulay argues that the inability of these scholars and learned people to make themselves relevant to the British Indian Government, was not because they were not educated enough, but because they were not equipped with the correct form of education. Their engagement with native and traditional literature alone can only be understood as a way by which young men were being 'bribed . . . out of the revenues of the State, to waste their youth in learning how they are to purify themselves after touching an ass or what texts of the Vedas they are to repeat to expiate the crime of killing a goat'.

Macaulay argued that in order to equip the native into becoming a bona fide learner, the first step was not just to import the great literature from the United Kingdom to India, but to set up codes and laws that decide whether a native is capable of becoming a learner. Thus, before he brought the Shakespearean sonnet to India, Macaulay instituted two forms that would train the native into becoming a legitimate learner. These codes and laws found their form in the accounting ledger and the Indian Penal Code. Both of these systems sought to correct the social, moral and ethical nature of the native, in order for him to appreciate and engage with the fine minds of British thought. They are perhaps best embodied in a silent looped video projection by the Raqs Media art collective in New Delhi, India, titled 'An Afternoon Unregistered on the Richter Scale'<sup>6</sup>. In this installation, Raqs transforms an archival photograph taken in Calcutta in 1911 to:

Conjure a constellation of stars onto a drawing board, induce tremors too gentle to disturb the Richter Scale . . . and introduce a rustle and hesitation in the determined stillness of surveyors hard at work mapping empire.

(Raqs Media Collective, 2012)

In the bodies of the surveyors, I see the figure of the accountants who kept count of the wealth and the resources of the British East India Company and its empire. The question of accounts and revenue was also present in Macaulay's justification for introducing English language learning over local language development. As Macaulay gainfully observes:

The committee have thought fit to lay out above a lakh of rupees in printing Arabic and Sanscrit books. Those books find no purchasers . . . During the last three years about sixty thousand rupees have been expended in this manner. The sale of Arabic and Sanscrit books during those three years has not yielded quite one thousand rupees. In the meantime, the School Book Society is selling seven or eight thousand English volumes every year, and not only pays the expenses of printing but realizes a profit of twenty per cent on its outlay.

(Macaulay, 'Minute on Education', 1835).

The accounting was something that the native had to be taught and also the justification of why the native should be taught English. The picture of the accountants in Bengal, embedded in the Raqs collective's video art, reminds us that the most dominant form of producing the learner was through the ledger—the infrastructure trace of information that balances on both sides to maintain a state of equilibrium. The ledger serves, even today, as a metaphor to understand the logics and logistics of enrolment ratios and affirmative action within education. The accounting of those who can be counted remains central to the quantified logics of MOOCs, which seek to produce the learner as intelligible and legible, as somebody who can count and be counted.

Along with the ledger, Macaulay also spent considerable energy in drafting the first draft of the Indian Penal Code, in an attempt to transform the native into a pukka Sahib, a true honourable British Man instead of the Heathen caught in his own primitiveness (Chang, Wright and Stanley, 2011). In order to achieve this transformation, Macaulay drafted the code, convinced that 'no country ever stood so much in need of a code of laws as India and . . . that there never was a country in which the want might be so easily supplied' (Macaulay, cited in Douglas Sanders, 2009). Subsequently, drawing on the British criminal laws developed by Jeremy Bentham, he produced a series of codes that sought to build an aspirational model of an educated native and also to criminalize and control the libidinal 'abominations and vices' of the Indian heathen. Macaulay reformulated the 'buggery law' of old Britain to ensure that the Indians, who were 'lesser breeds without the law', did not succumb to the temptations of the flesh. These boundaries suggested how much space must be maintained between two men in the close working environment of the British administrative office, so that they can concentrate on their work and resist the urge to break into song, dance and sodomy.

In the Raqs Media Collective's animation of the snapshot, as it moves from light to dark, I read the possibility of a homoerotic camaraderie that Macaulay imagined in the unsupervised offices of work. As the artists explain in an interview:

The image points to the fact that political power is not simply a matter of brute force, boots and guns on the ground, but also an apparatus of subjugating a territory through knowledge, through data maps, lines on maps, figures and numbers. What is interesting is also the fact that the apparatus established by the British Empire in terms of knowing 'people and territory' as a means of exercising power has continued virtually untouched within the framework of the Indian Republic.

(Raqs Media Collective, cited in Emilia Terracciano's 2012 article for Photomonitor)

Only once the native was taught to count and be counted, to compute and be computed in the logics of colonization, and only once the native was trained to understand the penal implications of his penile desires, could the native could be imagined as a learner—somebody who can be trained to appreciate the

<sup>6</sup> A digital copy of the looped video projection is available at <https://vimeo.com/84205912>.

value of literature and the power of poetry that invited him to wander lonely as a cloud and chance upon a host of daffodils. Macaulay's governmental and policy injunctions and interventions remind us that in order even to imagine a learner as somebody who is capable of the acts of reading and interpretation, of application and administration, a massive infrastructure of accounting and policing had to come into being. I go back to this history because these kinds of systems of control and domination are absent from our understanding of the imagined learner of MOOCs, and I am suggesting that we need to unpack and map the different forms of exclusion and filtering that still preclude people from accessing the resources that MOOCs promise to open. I am proposing that we need to understand the intentions, the scope, the focus and the breadth of the 'massive' in relation to the learner, which go beyond questions of access to information and are rooted in the production of the corporeal and culpable bodies of those who cannot even be imagined as learners, bereft of histories, and are invisible in stories of open education and learning.

### THE PERVERTED ARCHIVIST

The heathen, as a learner, remains invisible in the stories and forgotten in the histories of learning that emerge around the idea of MOOCs. However, if the role of the digital is to turn memory into archive, then it is only natural that the heathen, both as an historical artefact and as a bearer of history, becomes sorted, stored and forgotten in the annals of computational archives, remembered by the algorithms of archiving and databases of belonging. Tied closely to this notion of the archive is the second learner that is ubiquitously present and excessively centred in the debates around learning within MOOCs—that is the figure of the archivist. The archivist, in our database times, has become familiar: everybody with a semi-smart digital device possesses an archive. Especially within MOOC design, the learner is conceptualized as the novice-expert (Ruth and Houghton, 2009) and archiving as central to online pedagogy. Despite digital cultural references to Rule No. 34<sup>7</sup>, or the crackdown on illegal bit torrent archives like Napster and The Pirate Bay, and despite the exposure of the 'dark web' on spaces like Silk Road (Ormsby, 2014) or the persistent existence of revenge pornography websites, the archivist is still imagined as a cultural warrior on the noble quest of preserving, curating and distributing knowledge.

I want to question this imagination of the archivist as motivated by the sapio-sexual dreams of data and instead suggest that there is a story of excesses, of impulses, of perverted desires and of erotic emissions that create, animate and preserve archives. One such tale from India is about a scandalous public archive that revolves around a cartoon figure in a comic strip. Savita Bhabhi became an iconic cartoon figure, disrupting on the Indian internet in March 2008. Created under the pseudonym of Deshmukh, the first adult comic strip series on the website SavitaBhabhi.com depicted the life of an Indian housewife who had fantasy-filled and fantastic adulterous experiences with different men, in the absence of a husband who was always travelling or working. In many ways, the Savita Bhabhi comic strips followed the standard trope of adult fantasy encounters in other pornographic spaces. However, the setting of the Indian family and the tropes of transgression that the central married female character embodied across the 51 stories published under this moniker destabilizes the home as the glorified location of family values and conservative morality hyped in popular cultural production.

The emergence of an Indian body in circumstances that seemed more real than the clandestine foreign pornography made the comic strip an overnight viral phenomenon. For over a year, Savita Bhabhi became the new face of Indian pornographic expression, where 'bodies like ours' were suddenly installed as actors in fantasy, rather than mere consumers for it (Malhotra, 2010). In 2008 it became the 82nd most visited Indian website (Rodriguez, 2009). It received many accolades

from the national media for representing a new sexually empowered, unapologetic female protagonist, who embodied the liberating sexual mores of a largely conservative country. It also saw a large amount of public critique and controversy as conservative activists filed petitions and imagined the harm of obscene cartoons to the children who are the imagined audience of comic strips (Shruthjith, 2009).<sup>8</sup>

In 2009 the sexual adventures of Savita Bhabhi were called to an abrupt halt when the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology issued an order asking all internet service providers to block access to the website. N. Vijayaditya of the Controller of Certifying Authorities, which is enabled by law to block websites, commented in an interview that by doing so the office was paying heed to the voices of protest. In law, the owners of the website would have the chance to appeal the ban, but that would have required the pseudonymous author to reveal his identity. Initially, the main creator of the website, Puneet Agarwal, who is a second-generation Indian in London, United Kingdom, took responsibility for the website and started a 'Save Our Savita Bhabhi' campaign (Vembu, 2009) to muster public interest and support for the removal of the ban. However, citing 'family pressures', he withdrew from the campaign and Savita Bhabhi seemed to become invisible, hidden behind the ban (NextBigWhat, 2009).

Once the ban was enforced, instead of Savita Bhabhi disappearing from digital storage and public memory, multiple archives emerged across the peer-to-peer networks of the web. Memes around Savita Bhabhi became popular, using both her name and her form as a part of social exchange on the internet. The internet pornographer suddenly became an internet archivist, animating an archive under threat, and using the distributed and connected networks to create a lingering memory of material that had affective and personal investments for him through his affective relationship with the material.

The story of Savita Bhabhi and the figure of the perverted archivist storing data and restoring them when they disappear is the story both of degeneration of archives and the planned obsolescence (Fitzpatrick, 2011) of our data lives. Archives are born of excesses, marked by obsessions, animated by passion and sustained through affective and personal investment. Archiving is not a mechanical job of maintaining databases, but the task of resurrecting information by constantly circulating it and creating new relationships with and within it. Archivists are learners in the way they infuse that information with an excess of meaning and value way beyond its expiry date or relevance to the contemporary. Savita Bhabhi, both in her viral prevalence and legal immanence, reminds us that archives are external memories and in a state of degeneration. Storage, which is precarious, because it gets forgotten when technology formats and structures are invalidated by new forms of coding and access, is not the same as an archive. There is a very real threat that as attention spans shift and the frequency of updates decreases, archives might get forgotten and memories may no longer be retained. The digital archive requires algorithms that remember, indexes that cross-reference and protocols that constantly animate and activate the records.

<sup>8</sup> As Shruthjith reports, 'One of them, Bangalore-based N. Vijayashankar, who describes himself as a "techno-legal information security consultant", waged a sustained campaign against Savitabhabhi, complaining to the government's Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) as well as the Director General of Police in Karnataka in October last year. "Cartoons are a more participative medium. Videos don't do as much damage. When a child is watching a cartoon, he imagines himself as the character. This has a deeply corrupting influence on our youngsters. This, apart from the fact that an Indian name was being used in such an obscene cartoon, is what led me to make the complaint", Vijayashankar said. "A child will see a Savitabhabhi among his relatives". When asked if there was any scientific basis to his thesis that pornographic cartoons did more damage to young people than pornographic videos, he said that was his own psychological interpretation.'

<sup>7</sup> Rule 34 is an internet meme that says, 'If it exists, there is porn of it, no exceptions', and has been used extensively to refer to the ways in which the internet has become one giant porn archive (<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/rule-34>).

The archive itself, however, requires that impassioned, perverted archivist who has an unnatural relationship with the content of the data and the form of the archive. This is a different imagination of the learner, as somebody who is not defined through end products and certification, but as an information warrior. While this ;super geek; features centrally in the construction of knowledge sites such as Wikipedia, where editors spend thankless hours writing, correcting and painstakingly referencing information on esoteric and remote areas that they are personally invested in, the archivist in conversations around MOOCs is often reduced to a gatekeeper of indexed data. The responsibility of MOOCs is also limited to opening up storage possibilities and opening up databases to the learner, without paying attention to the affective and personal relationships that catalyze learning in such information environments. In order to think of the archivist as a learner, who animates, activates and archives the information in a meaningful way, to build collaborative communities and persistent practices of forming and sustaining archives, we are going to have to look beyond the transactional, the interface and the algorithm logics embedded in the structure of MOOCs.

### THE STALKER DOLPHIN

The notions of anonymity, pseudonymity, multiple and distributed identities, and the unknown nature of the person that we are connecting to in our networked environments have been at the heart of some of the most heated discussions on and about the internet. The question of who we are talking to when we talk to somebody online has informed the history of the user and the learner in the digital world. From the early days of the MUDs (multi-user dungeons), when people were mapping the digital avatars on their physical bodies (Turkle, 1996; Dibbell, 1993), to the emergence of artificial intelligence scripts that perform human-like actions with ease (Lucci and Kopec, 2013; Kurzwel, 2005), there has been much anxiety and fruitful enquiry into what constitutes a user online. However, when it comes to the world of connected learning, and especially to MOOCs, this history of the learner as a user is also almost entirely absent. We work within an assumption that all human learners being enrolled in these systems are the same kind of internet user. We try and develop systemized solutions and approaches that have flexibility and interface customization, but often on the basis of no real understanding or questioning of the learner who is the intended audience of MOOCs. There might be claims for diversity based on access to infrastructure and digital and linguistic literacy, but the learner remains the same as the one who was imagined in times before the digital. While MOOCs constantly seem to be evolving their structures and building new functionalities, they are contingent upon the notion of a learner who has not changed at all.

The figure of the learner that I want to propose radically shifts the information delivery mechanisms, but also the presumed human status and conditions of the learner. It is embedded in the history of cybernetics at the moment when John C. Lilly (1962) hypothesized that the true learner of the future was the dolphin. Funded by the USA's National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), Lilly began a project to communicate with dolphins, in an attempt to develop a system to communicate with extra-terrestrial beings. The central lab of this experiment was a dolphinarium that was part land, part water, flooded knee-deep where a bottlenose dolphin called Peter cohabited with animal researcher and Lilly's assistant, Margaret Howe. The aim of the experiment was to teach Peter to identify, mimic and learn human language through an affective and personal relationship with Howe.

As Howe and Peter lived together, in isolation, Peter slowly started getting obsessed with Howe. He started following her, demanding physical contact, sleeping under her bed suspended over water, and refusing the company of other, female dolphins. In an attempt to reach that threshold where Peter would want to learn the new language, Howe was asked to assuage the stalker dolphin—physically and emotionally.

While Lilly's claims of Peter actually learning to pronounce words such as 'ball' and 'diamond' due to this innovative

learning environment do not stand up to the measure of scientific and objective truth, and it is dubious whether Howe's intense inter-species involvement with Peter actually led to the dolphin learning that was hypothesized, there is, in this model, a reimagination of the learner that is missing from our maps of the MOOCs. It is the imagination of a learner as an unknown entity, as somebody we have not yet figured out and as embodying a diversity that goes beyond difference, and posits real challenges to imagining the pedagogic methods and knowledge delivery mechanisms of MOOCs.

### DIVERSITY VERSUS SCALE: TOWARDS REALIZING THE PROMISES OF MOOCs

I began with looking at the two notions of openness and diversity that inform MOOCs, and subsequently at the future of online and connected learning. There is an idealized hope that MOOCs will open up traditional, gated learning environments to shape inclusive and massive educational structures. I suggested that this rhetoric of openness has a contradiction where it focuses on opening up access to the same kind of learners, while avowing a diverse, traditionally excluded learner as its intended audience.

Through the three examples—from Macaulay, Savita Bhabhi and Howe—I questioned how we understand these principles and the learners who are the intended beneficiaries of MOOCs. I have argued, through the colonial encounter of the British Empire with the native Heathen in India, that massive infrastructure of control and domination enables somebody to become a learner. Infrastructure is about shaping, controlling, filtering and enabling the person to become a particular kind of learner who is accepted, validated, authenticated and legible to the system of learning that is being established. When thinking about the learner in a MOOC, we need to unpack the conditions of freedom and control that are set into place in order for somebody to become a learner. I have further argued, through the Savita Bhabhi archive restoration, that learning itself needs to be freed from the quantified logics of connected learning environments. Shifting our focus from how learning gets quantified to how learners learn, introducing ideas of affect, of perversion, of passion and of obsession, which are all different forms of engaging with knowledge, might help in complicating the ideas of both what constitutes a learner and how critical and engaged learning can be enabled. In examining the experiments of Howe, I have proposed that the true promise of diversity is not about getting a large quantity of the same kind of learners, but of trying to think of other kinds of learners—like stalker dolphins—who remain outside the logics and logistics of MOOCs.

My proposition is that much of the success of MOOCs is right now quantified and measured in terms of scale. The element of 'massive' overrides other principles to do with democratization of education and reaching out to diverse learners. The global scope of MOOCs and the ability to harness the many users of the same kind is often confused with real diversity of learners. The diversity that we attribute to our multi-mediated forms, multi-modal interactivity and multi-purpose learners is a false diversity. It pretends to have difference when all it really has is scale.

I conclude by suggesting that the MOOC has to be understood as an idea that is still finding its form, rather than a solution that needs to be mainstreamed. In our conversations about MOOCs, we have come to locate diversity in our methods, applications, platforms and interfaces, but at the same time we construct a monolithic learner that is both imaginary and idealized. This imagined learner is dissociated from larger histories of domination and control, the affective structures of learning and engagement, and even the 'born digital' debates about the user in the digital environment. If we want to think of MOOCs as pointing towards the future of our learning, then we will have to add to the discourse on learning principles and platforms complex narratives of what constitutes the learner. In doing so, we might think of heathens, perverts and dolphins as representing the true challenges to the intentions, attentions and affectations of connected learning research, practice and operationalization.

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