1. Knowledge Deficits

"Many mass entertainments have historical content, however much the facts get skewed. The historical imagination of most young people extends not much further than the episodes in their own lives."

-Chronicle of Higher Education, Sam Wineburg

"The unique failings of the Dumbest Generation don't originate in the home, social, and leisure lives of young Americans..."

-Denise Visuano, CSE619

"If leisure diversions complement academic performance, then the enhancement of them will show up in education scores and surveys. If the numbers remain low and flat while leisure improves, as is the case today, then teen and young adult customs and mores must have an anti-intellectual effect."

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2. The New Bibliophiles

Language defines our culture, and is limited, in part, by our inability to recognize its importance. "Since intelligence is primarily defined as one's capacity to grasp the truth of things, it follows that what a culture means by intelligence is derived from the character of its important forms of communication."

-Page 24-25

-Re MacFarquhar's essay in Slate, 1997: "The essay says nothing insightful about the issue, but it illustrates well this curious tendency of educator and intellectuals to downplay evidence of mental stagnation in America...People who worry about reading declines and book culture are just overweight handwringers, alarmists disposed to neurotic visions of the end."

-Page 60-61

"For education to happen, people must encounter worthwhile things outside their sphere of interest and brainpower."

-Page 138

"The Web grows, and the young adult mind stalls."

-Page 108

"The unique failings of the Dumbest Generation don't originate in the home, social, and leisure lives of young Americans..."

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"The complexity he [Johnson] approves lies wholly on the surface-plot lines and verbs play-while other complexities (moral, psychological, and philosophical) go unremarked. Johnson neatly divides form from content. The content of screen substance—at its worst, juvenile loves and lusts, blood and guts, distortions of historical facts, petty clashes of reality contestants—is more important than he thinks."

-Page 90

"The Web grows, and the young adult mind stalls.”

-Page 108

"How do you argue against a movement that has no desire to learn to do something with their own brainpower? Yes, we can use the technology to help—but why settle for letting a machine be smarter than yourself, and just assuming—accepting—that it’s not worth the effort to know something first hand?"

-Education Week, April 2007: high school student: “When I step in school, I feel like I’m not me anymore. I have to jump into this old-fashioned thing where everything is restricted...Digital technology reflects his identity, books alienate him, teachers restrict him, and hundreds of peers echo his disquiet.”

-Page 68

2004 study by National Commission on Writing, business leaders surveyed...“found that a significant portion of them complain of serious reading and writing problems among new employees, forcing corporate America to spend approximately $3.1 billion annually on in-house literacy tutoring...The skills of new college graduates are deplorable...”

-Page 68-69

1998, American Political Science Association:...“current levels of political knowledge, political engagement, and political enthusiasm are so low as to threaten the vitality and stability of democratic politics in the United States...Digital habits have mushroomed, but reading scores for teens remain flat, and measure of scientific, cultural, and civic knowledge linger at abysmal levels."

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3. Screen Time

Expansion and access of Web never stops, and has no effect on TV-watching and video games: “Generation M concludes, ‘media use begets media use,’ and as more connections and feeds and streams an channels enter their private space, kids assimilate them with accelerating ease, adding one without dropping another.”

-Page 80

"A parent is proud of her young children’s alphabet knowledge obtained...from Sesame Street, 'I haven’t had to work with her at all.’”

-Something to be proud of??

-Page 80

Generation M reveals that “leisure reading of any kind correlates more closely with a student’s grades than any other media... and suggests that TV doesn’t have nearly the intellectual consequences that reading does.”

-Page 89

Quotes form Johnson’s book, Everything Bad is Good for You, who claims that popular culture is actually challenging and complex and cognitively stimulating. (See additional thoughts on “sophistication of plot lines.”)

"Whatever their other virtues, these minds know far too little, and they read and write and calculate and reflect way too poorly...The Web grows, and the young adult mind stalls.”

-Page 108

“Enough years have passed for us to expedite the intellectual payoff promised by the Web..."

-Page 93

“Screen intelligence...conditions minds against quiet, concerted study, against imagery unassisted by visuals, against linear, sequential analysis of texts, against an idle afternoon with a detective story and nothing else...explains why (they) appear at the same time so mentally agile and culturally ignorant. Visual culture improves the abstract spatialization and problem solving, but it doesn’t complement other intelligence-building activities.”

-Page 95

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Proponents of Web-based learning assert that “Web 2.0 makes users participants in critical, intellectual, artistic enterprises, and their own actions direct the growth of the virtual sphere...blogs, wikis and the rest swell the public intelligence. Adolescents adapt at them advance the collective mind and expand the storehouse of knowledge.” However...“that glorious creation of youth intelligence hasn’t materialized. The Web expands nonstop, absorbing everything it can, and more knowledge and beauty settle there by the hour. But no such enhancement has touched its most creative and frequent users, the digital natives. There is no reciprocal effect.”

-Page 107

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-Page 108

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-Page 93
The psychological delights are intellectually stultifying. For education to happen, people must encounter worthwhile things outside their sphere of interest and brainpower.” p. 138

"But for all the popularity of games among teens and the faith among experts that they instill higher-order thinking skills, U. S. employers complain relentlessly about lower-order thinking skills, the poor verbal and numerical competencies of incoming workers.” p. 139

“Screen reading isn’t a supplement anymore, it is no longer an ‘extension’ of thinking skills beyond the ‘linear-sequential model.’ It’s the primary activity, and the cultivation of nonlinear, nonhierarchical, nonsentential thought patterns through Web reading now transpires on top of a thin and cracking foundation of print reading.” p. 141

Jakob Nielsen. 1997: “How Users Read on the Web.” They don’t... Overall, teens displayed reading skills, research procedures, and patience levels insufficient to navigate the Web effectively.” p. 145-6

“The Web is a consumer habitat, not an educational one.” p. 149

“Their choices are never limited, and the initial frustrations of richer experiences send them elsewhere within seconds. With so much abundance, variety, and speed, users key in to exactly what they already want...” p. 208-09

“Our society is so parcelled out into professional and political niches that direct and open ideological combat infrequently takes place. Intellectuals operate in restricted settings - teachers in classrooms, professors at scholarly conferences...bloggers at home.” p. 219-20

30s: “They don’t read enough books and study enough artworks, or care enough to do so. They don’t ponder enough ideas or have the vocabulary to discuss them. They derive no lessons from history and revere few heroes outside pop culture and from before 1990.” p. 223

“Among the Millennials, intellectual life can’t compete with social life, and if social life has no intellectual content, tradition wither and die. Books can’t hold their own screen images, and without help, high art always loses to low amusements.” p. 234

“Social life and leisure time play essential roles in the maturing process, and if the knowledge principle disappears, if books, artworks, historical facts, and civic debates—ina word, an intellectual forenic—vacate the scene, then the knowledge young people acquire later on never penetrates their hearts.” p. 235

“The latest social and leisure dispositions of the young are killing the culture, and when they turn 40 years old, and realize what they failed to learn in their younger days, it will be too late. Fewer books are checked out of public libraries and more videos. More kids go to the mall and fewer to the museum. Lunchroom conversations never drift to ideology, but Web photos pass nonsense...if parents and teachers and reporters don’t see it now, they’re blind. If they don’t respond, their unconsiderable...” p. 235

"The youth of America occupy a point in history like every other generation did and will, and their time will end. But the effects of their habits will outlast them. (And risk being remembered as being) unworthy of the privileges they inherited.” p. 236

Additional reading:


“Teachers have the difficult job of not just understanding a body of academic facts—they must understand their students. Learning isn’t about acquiring information, maximizing efficiency, or enjoyment. Learning is about developing human capacity.” p. 22

“Faced with pressing educational and social problems, technology promoters turn first to the Internet. They’re blind to other possible solutions, such as more teacher support, better teaching conditions, tighter discipline, more appropriateness curricula, or recasting school goals. This obsession with computer tilts community activity as well. There’s no reason to improve the library, start a health clinic, or open a community college.” p. 25

Planned Obsolescence: “...as information grows dated, Web pages will need constant attention: tuning, updates, and more hyperlinks. All this, of course, demands vigilant human attention. The fountain of free Internet information requires constant maintenance...” Overall, consumers aren’t willing to pay, the result will be obsolete Web sites with dangling pointers and outdated information. Come to think of it, human beings—indeed all biological species—are incapable of planned obsolescence. Since we become obsolete with any planning, why should computers be much different?” p. 169

“...like McDonald’s, the Internet delivers a product which is fast, easy, and cheap...it satisfies their needs. And like McDonald’s, the Internet drives out classic establishments which deliver high quality. One pushes aside mom-and-pop restaurants, the other undercuts libraries...With information, as with food, cheap and fast work against good.” p. 189

“In communications, as in education, the cheapest way to present facts is often the least memorable and least convincing...In information, as in good, housing, and schooling, you get what you pay for.” p. 194

“Deep social ties are relationships with frequent contact, deep feelings and involvement, and broad content. Weak ties have superficial and easily broken bonds, infrequent content, and narrow focus. Weak ties link us to information and social resources outside our close social groups. But it’s the strong social ties that buffer us from stress and lead to better social interactions.” (Study by Kraut and Lundmark)... “(The psychologists found an average increase in depression by about 1 percent for every hour spent online.” p. 198-99

“Paradoxically, the Internet is a social technology used for communication, yet its results in declining social involvement and psychological well-being.” p. 200

As per McLuhan: “The electronic revolution of e-mails and faxes means the medium has finally become the message,” said Stanford Professor Zimbardo (1997 conference). “With more virtual reality overtaking real reality we’re losing ordinary social habits of the common social situations and becoming more isolated.” These electronic intermediaries dull our abilities to read each other’s gestures and facial expressions, to express our feelings; to strike up conversations with strangers, to craft stories, to tell jokes. Those warned on computer communications won’t learn basic social rules of conversation.” p. 203