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## **‘Sending Messages to a Machine’: articulating ethe-real selves in blended teaching (and learning)**

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**ABSTRACT** Teaching and learning online is one of several risky practices in higher education today that threaten to disfigure academics’ work and identity. For many academics, accustomed to the tempo and practices of face-to-face teaching, it threatens disorientation. In this article the author examines the teaching beliefs of a computer science lecturer, via the lens of his self-ascribed teaching metaphor (the Performer). Seb and other participants in the author’s research are grappling with new modes of pedagogical being – ‘blended teaching and learning’ – the structures and practices of which straddle the imprecise boundaries of live and asynchronous pedagogies. Why does the hybrid, blended academic choose and value ‘traditional’, on-campus face-to-face lectures and/or seminars over online modes? The prospect of becoming a machine – a cyborg academic, a tech(no)body teacher clearly troubles him. An early adopter and technology enthusiast, Seb nevertheless prefers the embodied riskiness of ‘real’ face-to-face teaching over the ‘ethereal’ uncertainty of online pedagogy.

### **Introduction**

After I’ve visited them [the students in Singapore] and come back to Australia, the email I get, a) quantity and b) just the content and the manner in it, is totally different. Because now they know Seb, they know who Seb is and Seb is a normal human being. He’s not something out there on the Internet – ethereal and non-contactable ... The message I get beforehand is that they, ... I mean they could be sending telegrams to the Queen, almost y’know ... it’s almost as if you’re an entity but you’re not necessarily human like they are, I mean they could be just sending messages to a machine. (Seb)

The purpose of this article is to understand better, via the lens of Seb’s experience, academics’ apparent preference for live, face-to-face lecturing in a period of technological choice and pedagogical change in university teaching and learning. The contributions and ideas in it are sourced from the data and writings of an ongoing qualitative study researching academic identity and online teaching. Seb is one of 12 university lecturers, who became involved in online teaching at two different universities, who took part in the study. He was one of a group of five ‘technology enthusiast’ colleagues in an early phase of the work who revealed a preference for retaining face-to-face teaching as a focal pedagogic experience in subject/unit design (McShane, 2004) – a finding that parallels similar observations about students’ preferences for face-to-face instruction and their disinclination for computer-mediated communication (Bayne & Land, 1999).

My research seeks in part to reclaim the voice of the academic teacher during an era when (it seems) ‘the student’ has become the centre of attention in universities’ teaching and learning policies and in much higher education teaching and learning research. As an academic developer, I work with lecturers who face the challenges of blending online teaching with their existing teaching practices. One common assertion my colleagues make is that face-to-face teaching is ‘just so much better’ than online teaching. Why is face-to-face teaching so valued? If we are to believe Laurillard (2002), online ‘interactive’ communication such as online discussions can offer powerful

learning-teaching contexts, yet many academics are often initially reluctant to adopt and integrate them into their existing teaching practice/s.

The significance of face-to-face teaching for lecturers who 'make the move' (Taylor et al, 1996) to teach online is the particular focus of this article. Here I will focus largely on one academic's experiences and views about online and face-to-face teaching, particularly as these are revealed via his teaching metaphor (the Performer). This article aims to explore aspects of the affective experiences of teaching online (Peters, 2004) from the perspective of one online teacher academic. However, I want to give some background to this singular case study by reviewing some of the issues and literature about academic work, identity and experiences of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

### **Academic Identity and ICT**

The changing nature of academics' work and identity, particularly in terms of their work role/s and their relationship/s with their institution continues to be discussed and analysed by a range of commentators (see, for example, Nixon, 1996; Trowler, 1998; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999; Martin, 1999; Taylor, 1999; Blackmore, 2001; Tierney, 2001; Walker, 2002; Clegg, 2003; Gale & Kitto, 2003; McWilliam, 2004). Academic work has come under increasing scrutiny, with reflexive implications for academic identity. 'Academic freedom' once hinted at intellectual work – research and teaching – that was conducted independently and in relative privacy. Nowadays, academic work demands more visibility, collaboration, new responsibilities, 'performative fabrications' (Ball, 2000, 2003) and accountability.

[A]ny residual monasticism that may still be lurking in sandstone corridors must be flushed out into the bright light of accountability – rendered visible to all, and most importantly to the academics who still have so much (self) work to do. (McWilliam, 2004, p. 161)

A major discursive shift that has taken place in higher education is the convergence of the dominant discourse of 'student learning' (see, for example, Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Laurillard, 2002; Ramsden, 2003) with key discourses that locate the 'student as client' of the corporate university, and as a 'flexible learner'. Thus, attention is focused onto the student and away from the academic (who is now a service provider? a salesperson?). Indeed, the teacherly work of academics is rarely mentioned in recent higher education teaching and learning policy documents. Instead we find that new modes of ICT are now touted as enablers of more effective student learning, with technology being advanced as an implicit solution to supplement or replace 'out-moded transmission-based approaches' (see, for example, Department of Education, Science and Training [DEST], 2002).

The uptake and use of ICT in universities is both symptomatic and symbolic of the changing nature of academic work, and online teaching is one of several risky practices in higher education today that threaten to disfigure academics' work and identity (McWilliam, 2004). Indeed, it represents, for many academics, the ultimate disorienting dilemma in higher education (Campbell-Gibson, 2000).

New ICTs are also contributing to the dissolution and fragmentation of the (Western) autonomous, rationalist individual. Barglow (1994) argues that the human self both shapes itself around, and submits itself to, a new technology. Information processing concepts and practices are playing an important role in subverting the unity and coherence of the modernist world. That is, modernist social tenets of boundary, centred subjectivity, ethics, recognition and identification are being undermined by the many ways we manipulate (and are manipulated by) information technologies (Barglow, 1994, pp. 63-65; see also Castells, 1999).

Taylor et al (1996) noted in their study of lecturers in three Brisbane universities that 'making the move' to online teaching/learning environments resulted in shifting, new roles for teachers and learners. The effects of change have been being articulated most clearly in the research into computer-mediated communication (CMC), where traditional teacher-learner roles are disturbed and reorganised. In online communication-based learning environments, teachers become learners, and learners become teachers. Teachers and students work and communicate as peers, and much of the literature in the field explores the complex online learning relationships that can develop in CMC-mediated learning contexts. These themes are common across a range of studies (see: Riel, in

Harasim, 1993; Hiltz, 1994; Harasim et al, 1995; Mowrer, 1996; Steeples et al, 1996; Taylor, et al, 1996; Berge, 1997; Dexter et al, 1999; Smith, 2000)

The tendency to shifting and temporary identification as a consequence of engaging with ICT is reflected in labels, metaphors and unusual descriptors that describe the work of academics who teach online. Email list moderators, for example, report new teaching demands and new roles such as needing to become: firefighter, filter, facilitator, editor, manager, discussion leader, content expert, helper and marketer (Berge & Collins, 2000).

It seems inevitable that significant challenges await the academic who, while experienced in face-to-face lecturing and tutoring, decides (is asked, or responds to silent, performative pressures) to undertake online teaching. Another consequence of the 'move' is that the customarily autonomous academic must rely on training, support and collaboration – and often with non-academic colleagues – in order to realise their online materials and activities. And this, coupled with the mutability of teachers' and learners' roles in online CMC environments, signals some real challenges in the 'move' online to the authority, status and power of the university lecturer.

### Methodology

There is little critical dialogue about the subjective impact on lecturers of online and blended teaching. My broad research project, supported by individual case accounts such as the one outlined here, aims to shed light on how academics are experiencing change in their teaching, as well as to illuminate our understanding about the changing nature of university education.

Seb has taken part in a qualitative, interpretative study – a collective case study (Stake, 1998). He is one of 12 university lecturer colleagues from a spread of disciplines in two Australian universities. All participants were using some kind of online CMC format, such as email, electronic discussion lists or 'chat', in their teaching, and they volunteered to take part after reading about my research project and expressing interest. In 1998, five 'technology enthusiast' lecturers (Taylor et al, 1996; Thompson & Holt, 1997; Taylor, 1999), from a large multicampus university in Victoria formed the first research phase. In 2001, seven lecturers (five novice online, two online distance educators) from a large metropolitan university in New South Wales (NSW), were selected to participate in the second phase.

Participants reflected on their teaching beliefs and practices in a series of conversational interviews and in the occasional email exchange with me. They were encouraged to exemplify their beliefs with lively stories and anecdotes, and the sharing of subject outlines and online teaching artefacts. We also discussed their teaching metaphor/s and views on the pedagogical affordances of face-to-face and online contexts. My position and agency in the research, as researcher, and as developer colleague to the participants, has had to be carefully reflexive. At times I have to grapple knowingly with my developer's perspective and my knowledge of context, my selectivity, and my own positions on the matters I interpret and write about.

During our conversations, I invited my lecturer colleagues to share and discuss with me metaphors that they felt best described them as university teachers in face-to-face and online contexts. This articulation and analysis of metaphor was incorporated deliberately in to this research as an intentional strategy of identity representation. The conscious and unconscious use of metaphor is tied intimately to the intentional, discursive production of our identities. Their metaphors may perhaps be best appreciated as discursive masks, as 'Discourse-identities' (Gee, 2001/2002), and they provided the lecturers with an imaginative means of articulating their teaching identities. As an analytic strategy, they provide a productive, generative (Lee & Green, 2004) point of reference for the interpretative sense-making in my study. Koro-Ljungberg (2004, p. 358) notes too, that they 'open up the chains of meanings and lines of related thoughts, and they reveal present discourses, positions of power, and relevant value systems'.

One clear theme that emerged from my research interactions with the first group of five 'enthusiasts' was that these technology-confident lecturers had all retained face-to-face teaching practices at the core of the student learning experience in their mixed-mode (blended) subjects (McShane, 2004). In the next section of this article I will introduce a colleague and research participant, Seb (a pseudonym). Seb is a technology enthusiast who was quick to take up and use new online approaches – including the trialling of early versions of current learning management

systems with his computer science students. His concerns about what might be missing in these, and his attempts to explicate what he felt was important in his teaching identity, that was not met by the new modes, deserves attention. Seb is a single case, but one chosen from those who are not resistant to contemporary ICT innovation in universities. Exploring in more depth his perspectives about academic identity issues offers the potential for elucidating some insights into ICT-related resistances that have been more widely observed.

### Seb Teaches Computer Science ...

Sebastian (Seb) is an experienced teacher of Computer Science subjects. At the time of our most intense interaction for this research, Seb had been teaching undergraduate and postgraduate students about computers and with computers for 22 years. His students were from regional and metropolitan areas of Australia, and more recently he had started teaching overseas students in Singapore and Malaysia. Particularly relevant to this research is the fact that Seb is an expert computer user and computer teacher, who has experienced, and occasionally tested, a range of online communications technologies. I will discuss Seb's online teaching further in the following sections. But firstly I need to show a little more about Seb the teacher, and his teaching beliefs and values.

#### 'Call me Seb'

I don't think I'll ever get away from face-to-face 'cause, y'know, body language is so much easier to get a message across to them. (Seb)

Seb enjoys his face-to-face teaching and the stories he tells suggest that he keeps a firm, friendly relationship with his students. He often describes his teaching self from the point of view of his students. When I ask him what would be the best thing about his teaching, he refers to formal student evaluation feedback and he follows this up with a story about a student petition:

and I can remember being in class with a load of kerfuffle going around, I think I've still got it if I can find it, but at the end, this petition was put up, about Seb not being their lecturer for the second half of the year, and 'We want Seb' and 'It's not fair!' and all this kind of stuff, and I thought, 'Well, I can't be doing too bad a job'.

For Seb, teaching and learning engage the senses. Along with hearing students' 'kerfuffle' in this incident, Seb also mentions *hearing* students' 'Oohs' and 'Aaahs' in class when showing a website, *smelling* the coffee during breaks with his students in Singapore, and feeling glad that he goes over to Singapore *to see* students and staff. Over 22 years he says his confidence as a teacher has increased, and he has learnt how to *handle* students. Seb particularly values face-to-face teaching for the *social contact and interaction* it enables.

Seb likes social interaction with his students, and email communication can be very frank and personal. Indeed, there is even a physical thrill in live, chat-based communication:

K: So you feel that you can represent your teaching role perhaps more comfortably in a chat than in a discussion room?

S: Yeah, and I think the only reason being that it's closer to face-to-face. But you don't actually see the face. It's mouth-to-mouth, or finger-to-finger virtually [*laughs*] – typing!

Seb likes being liked – indeed wanted – by his students, and lecturing is (metaphorically) like performing. He wants his students to attend face-to-face lectures where he can explain, demonstrate and perform. Seb also commented on his metaphor in an email to me:

I feel rewarded coming away from a lecture where the students appear to have learnt something that would have been difficult to grasp simply by reading and trying themselves. (Perhaps all I've done is speeded up the process for them.) As with a good theatrical performance, you have to hold their attention so they're at least listening to what you have to say and this is where being a good 'performer' comes in. (Seb: email communication, 04/00)

For Seb, teaching *is* face-to-face lecturing. He insists on travelling to Singapore to teach face-to-face intensive sessions (20 hours in total) in a subject which is otherwise online, and supported by local

tutors. Lecturing is a proximate physical experience and, in his view, he cannot be replaced by other print or electronic media.

if you're out there, entertaining them, bit of acting, they're gonna listen and you'll get a lot more across than they will do from just plain reading.

He peppers his lectures with anecdotes, and he takes pleasure from the fact that this can stimulate his students' interest. In his view, their interest in his lectures is focused on him and his stories, rather than his PowerPoint slides:

again I always bring forward examples, ahm, from real life ... It keeps them... rather than just simply going through PowerPoint slides, which I think are becoming ... [Seb grimaces jokingly to signal banality and laughs] ... ahmm ... and rather than just going through notes and rather than go through that, suddenly they will become ... turned on!

Lecturing seems to be a pleasurable aspect of teaching. In fact, for Seb lecturing *is* teaching, and in our communications and conversation he rarely mentioned the other necessary tasks of teaching such as lecture planning, giving feedback and assessment. The Performance metaphor reinforces the act itself, and we hear little of the rehearsals, rewrites and reflections that surround the live event. By retaining the live lecturing format, Seb and the other Performer participants [1] in the study are not only keeping themselves central to their students' learning, but they also appear to be retaining an event that symbolises and defines their role and authority as university lecturers.

Other Performer lecturers in this study also argue irreplaceability, due to particular strengths and preferences for proximity. Speaking about the WebCT learning management system, Seb also points out what he perceives to be the artificiality of online environments.

it's a distance teaching environment. You know, if there was no face-to-face contact, then fine. It would, could substitute for face-to-face contact. But when there is regular face-to-face contact, there's simply no real incentive for the students to invest the time in the discussion board. Now I could *require* them to do it, but it would be a very artificial environment.

It is interesting to note that the Performers in this study all revealed an unconscious fear of replacement by online teaching, by a 'machine', as Seb put it. The Performers were all male academics who, by and large, expressed a certain confidence in their teaching ability. Teaching for these Performer lecturers was a live, embodied act, and interaction with students was less central to their teacher identities. Like Seb, they never mentioned the planning, feedback and assessment dimensions of their role.

Another Performer in the study, Ron, was determined to integrate and make a success of his TopClass-based online material and activities, and he was openly enthusiastic with his students about the online components. Nevertheless, he recognised that he still clung to his lecturing practices, saying, for example: 'I don't think I can communicate any of the things I'm best at ... online'. Lecturing was the normative core; everything else was supplementary. However, he was a strong advocate within his School and University for the use of online modes to supplement face-to-face teaching.

### *Supplementation*

Seb, however, is more ambivalent about the supplementary potential of online affordances in his subjects. For him, lectures are central to teaching and learning in his subjects. He has chosen deliberately to limit the web-based components of his on-campus teaching to (a) the delivery of lecture notes and tutorial solutions, and (b) selective email communication with his students. Seb sees no need to develop his online teaching in other ways. His students' use of email and the online subject material is not directly assessed in the subject design or teaching. Other more discursive forms of online teaching (such as chat and threaded discussion lists) are seen as artificial and inadequate, in spite of professional experience to the contrary (e.g. he once collaboratively evaluated a website via a live chat session with an industry-based colleague in the United States). In spite of such experiences, Seb maintains the lecture format at the core of his curricula, and prides himself on giving interesting lectures. In his view, face-to-face teaching – indeed Seb himself – is irreplaceable.

There's not much you can't do face-to-face. Really. And you can give so much better explanations; that's where I find face-to-face good. Explaining and demonstrating. Very difficult to give a demonstration in an online situation.

He feels strongly that his students must come to his lectures, where he can see them and where they (as his audience, his spectators) can see him perform. Several times he insists that students who do not make it to lectures will miss out on something. Does Seb think they might miss out on him?

So I still want them to feel that they're missing out on something by not coming to a lecture, because when ... The notes augment the textbook, OK – and the notes are on the Web – and a lecture augments both of those, because I neither talk directly from the notes or the textbook when I'm giving a lecture.

Clearly, the textbook and online notes are not enough – the students must come to his lectures in order to achieve a complete understanding of the knowledge and skills required in the course. Note here how Seb mentions firstly that the online (lecture) notes augment or supplement the textbook-based curriculum. Essentially Seb is making a case here for the integrity of his face-to-face teaching. His musings about augmentation and the notion of supplementation call to mind Derrida's (1972) concept of 'the dangerous supplement'. The 'already complete' (the face-to-face teaching/teacher) is rendered inadequate and incomplete by having a 'supplement' (the online notes and materials). He immediately turns this around to defend the effect and integrity of his lectures – *a lecture augments both of those* – and by rendering himself as the supplement, he challenges the integrity and wholeness of the textbook and online notes. A lingering ambiguity remains around the matter of what/who is the supplement in Seb's blended Computer Science curriculum.

Seb is notably proud and defensive of his face-to-face teaching. An 'early adopter' of computer-based learning in higher education, he took up online teaching partly motivated by an intrinsic interest, and partly to model new ICTs for his Computer Science students.

Computers are what I've been teaching for 22 years and I've had to use computers to demonstrate what I teach.

In Seb's view, physical proximity in teaching and learning is natural, normal and real; online teaching is mechanical, text-based, and emotionless. Nevertheless, Seb's recent experience with the Singapore and Malaysian students has shown him that he can personalise his subject websites and interact online more informally than he had assumed previously. He has noticed that his email exchanges with his South-East Asian students are more frank and friendlier than those with local students. He says he has adapted the website material for these overseas students:

Yeah, certainly my web pages have changed. Initially they were just completely, I wouldn't say sterile, ... ahmm. They, initially they were very sort of content-related, they were almost like the contents of a book. Now, I tend to make them more ... myself speaking, OK? I'll talk in first person and I say 'Gee, it'll be great when I come to see you in so-and-so, but in the meantime, have a look at these problems. You don't have to do them all ...' Y'know, I tend to write as I speak, whereas before, it was done more as I did for my home students, who don't need that because they see me.

I will return to the issues and significance of this move to integrate himself (his speech) in a later section. But firstly, I want to investigate further Seb's suspicion of online teaching, because when it comes to making the move online, the idea of the Performer lecturer doesn't make the transition well, if at all. The spectre of the metaphoric Machine lurks.

*'Sending Messages to a Machine': integration and hybridity*

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. ... [T]he cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the West's escalating dominations of abstract individualism, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. (Haraway, 1991, pp. 149, 150-151)

In the previous section, via the lens of his Performer metaphor, I discussed Seb's values and beliefs about his teaching: his love of university teaching, the importance he places on physical presence, face-to-face lecturing and social interaction with his students. I also explored his understandings about face-to-face and online teaching through the notions of replaceability and supplementation. Here I want to look more closely into Seb's misgivings about online teaching (and learning), by confronting his greatest pedagogical fear: integration with the computer/machine.

Seb values and seeks out the physicality – indeed the sensuality – of face-to-face teaching. As noted before, he says he did not personalise the website material for local, *home* students – *because they see me* – because they come to his on-campus, face-to-face lectures. Being seen is very important to Seb. Once when we were discussing the portrayal of feelings through 'emoticons' (text-based iconic faces that signal mood and emotion), he commented:

but you can get into trouble [with emoticons], because all they're reading is text. They're not seeing your face, they're not seeing ...

When Seb reflects with me as to how his relationship with those international students develops over the distance, we get to the nub of the matter.

The message I get [before we meet face-to-face] is that they, I mean they could be sending telegrams to the Queen, almost, y'know? ... It's almost as if you're an entity but you're not necessarily human like they are; I mean they could be just sending messages to a machine. But after they've had you for the four nights, and they know ... they've spoken to you, then it is different. It is different. It's, well, even to the point of being: 'Dear Mr. Baxter blah-di blah-di blah ...' and 'Dear Seb ... afterwards. OK, 'cause, and I say to them 'Call me Seb. You don't have to call me Mr. Baxter. And once they feel that ... yeah, they're totally different once they've met you. And this is the other reason why I like the face-to-face side of it.

New teaching metaphors emerge to express new fears. The prospect of sending messages to the Queen, sending messages to a machine (in other words, to him the teacher) clearly troubles Seb. His concern about not being seen by his students has influenced the curriculum of his offshore teaching – he flies to Singapore and Malaysia to teach intensive face-to-face sessions:

after I've visited them [his Singapore students] and come back to Australia, the email I get a) quantity and b) just the content and the manner in it, is totally different. Because now they know Seb; they know who Seb is, and Seb is a normal human being. He's not something out there on the Internet – ethereal and non-contactable.

Thus Seb reveals an underlying fear that, without face-to-face contact with his students, he may become *an entity ... not necessarily human*. The fear of becoming *ethereal* clearly contrasts with the physical interaction that Seb values in face-to-face teaching. Seb wants to maintain his face-to-face lectures with his local students, even though he has discovered that some social contact and interaction can be developed through email. Replacing more of his face-to-face teaching with online components means that the Performer would become a machine, or indeed a hybrid, man-machine – a blended teacher-machine.

The pattern of blending, however, moves in both directions, between real and ethereal pedagogical contexts. As Seb says, 'The notes augment the textbook, OK and the notes are on the Web – and a lecture augments both of those'. Thus we understand that the lecture(r) supplements the online notes and textbook. But Seb mentions too how he has adapted the online notes to be less content-related (written text), so as to integrate more of himself:

Yeah, certainly my web pages have changed. Initially they were just completely, I wouldn't say sterile ... ahmm. They, initially they were very sort of content-related, they were almost like the contents of a book. Now, I tend to make them more ... myself speaking, OK?

The ultimate effect of such electronic writing, according to Poster (1990), is to disperse the subject so that it no longer functions as a unified centre. Under threat of decentring and destabilisation, Seb maintains 'contact' with his students in his face-to-face lectures, a core pedagogical event. The prospect of becoming a part-machine – a cyborg academic, a tech(no)body teacher (McWilliam & Palmer, 1995) – clearly troubles him. Seb's insights and assertions are influenced in part by the disciplinary discussions around human-computer interaction, for example, in his field of Computer Science. He recoils from the spectre of becoming a hybrid teacher-machine, unsettled by a blended

pedagogy that straddles 'that imprecise boundary between the physical, and non-physical world' (Haraway, 1991). Seb is aware that the ethe-real teacher-machine is potentially a monster, a regenerated entity comprising real and ethereal parts.

Hayles (1999) suggests that such panic will arise if one thinks of the subject as an autonomous self, independent of the environment. 'This view of the self authorizes the fear that if the boundaries are breached at all, there will be nothing to stop the self's complete dissolution' (Hayles, 1999, p. 290). She proposes that by becoming 'posthuman', one does not leave the body behind, but rather extend its embodied awareness and capabilities via electronic prostheses. Nonetheless, at least when it comes to teaching and learning, Seb is cautious about becoming a hybrid teacher/machine, and in his resistance he retains a preference for embodying and sharing the knowledge of his discipline through regular 'contact hours' and lectures.

#### *Online Ambivalence, or Face-to-Face Risk?*

Ambivalence, the possibility of assigning an object or an event to more than one category, is a language-specific disorder: a failure of the naming (segregating) function that language is meant to perform. The main symptom of the disorder is the acute discomfort we feel when we are unable to read the situation properly and to choose between alternative actions. (Bauman, 1991, p. 1)

Dreyfus (2001) has drawn attention to the spontaneity and risk involved in physical proximity. Like Seb, he privileges face-to-face learning, arguing that learning as expertise is best developed with a teacher and best acquired in proximate contexts where teachers and students speak, share moods and take risks – including the risk of being challenged, asked a question, being 'put on the spot':

Only in a classroom where a teacher and learner sense they are taking risks in each other's presence, and each can count on criticism from the other, are the conditions present that promote acquiring proficiency, and only by acting in the real world can one acquire expertise. (Dreyfus, 2001, p. 91)

For Dreyfus, of course, 'expertise' in 'the real world' is the humanist goal of (classroom-based) education. Seb, the autonomous, rationalist teacher, exemplifies the case Dreyfus has attempted to make in favour of face-to-face education in these technological times. Faced with the prospect, as Seb sees it, of becoming *a machine, ethereal, out there on the Internet*, he would rather have the familiar proximity of face-to-face teaching, with all its riskiness, its contingency (in all its senses), and the pleasures of regular contact hours with his students. And contact, as Levinas (1987) reminds us, is about tenderness and responsibility – somewhat old-fashioned values to be finding in the corporate, flexible university. But these are the humanist values of the embodied computer scientist who continues to pursue rationalist unity and certainty in his teaching. To be within the reach and grasp of his audience (his students) is essential if Seb's lecturing is to remain a metaphoric performance. This 'compulsion of proximity' (Boden & Molotch, 1994) also represents a defiant stand against any further migration of his teaching to online modes, where hybridity threatens to split, fragment and dissolve his certain teacherly self.

One all too human response to hybridity, ambiguity, and uncertainty is to take risks.

Risk is the modern approach to foresee and control the future consequences of human action, the various unintended consequences of radicalized modernization. It is an (institutionalised) attempt, a cognitive map, to colonise the future. (Beck, 1999, p. 3)

Indeed, face-to-face teaching is also not without its risks. In this study both Seb and Evan – metaphoric Performers – express a particular sense of vulnerability. Evan fears coming 'under fire' in his lectures:

You know I'm somebody who paces around and gestures. It's very much a dramatic performance with me. You know a lot of overheads, but you know I'm whipping things on and whipping things off. So I'm very much a moving target, kind of thing ... (Evan)

If Evan might sometimes feel himself to be a target, Seb holds the gun (metaphorically) in his lectures. In describing for me how he adapted his teaching to cater for the diverse student backgrounds in his subjects, Seb made four references (in the space of 27 lines) to aiming down the



middle. Perhaps the Performer is shadowed by the spectre of the Hunt. Lecturing is risky teaching, but regardless, Seb chooses that risk over what he sees as the ethereality and hybridity of disembodied online pedagogy.

### **Closing Reflections: the spectre of the machine**

If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts – including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory – which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must conserve the notion of writing, trace, gramme [written mark], or grapheme, until its own historico-metaphysical character is also exposed. (Derrida, [1967] 1974, p. 9)

Seb, of course, is just one participant in a larger project that is investigating academics' perceptions of the teaching challenges that arise with the adoption of these new technologies. A case study such as this investigation into Seb's experiences and beliefs offers familiar and novel insights into the lot of university lecturers. The value of this kind of qualitative research is best judged against criteria such as those proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1990) which acknowledge the process of this work as well as this product: resonance, rhetoric, empowerment (as consciousness-raising in this case) and the applicability of elements of Seb's experience; that is, the extent to which it might be used as 'a basis for re-examining and reconstructing one's own construction of a given phenomenon' (Lincoln & Guba, 1990, p. 58). In the midst of the rush to go online in our universities, this computer scientist and teaching academic invites us to think again about the human and pedagogical implications of introducing ICT into university curricula, teaching and learning.

Online and blended teaching and learning contexts offer particular sites for exploring further, and in different ways, some of the un/certainties and fears that haunt Seb and other academics. An emerging literature on embodiment and online education is signalling related themes of current interest and relevance: reflexivity, the imagination, emotions, emotional proximity and attenuation, relations and agency, trust, risk, anonymity and commitment (Burkitt, 1999; Hayles, 1999; Blake, 2002; Burbles, 2002; Dreyfus, 2002).

The integration of ICT also provides an intense opportunity for investigating change in universities and in the academic lifeworld. In my broader research study, as well as in singular case studies such as this one, I seek to articulate academics' sense of change – of what is being lost and what is being gained – in academic life, and particularly in lecturing, teaching and learning. Online teaching thus becomes a metonym of change in universities and, in particular, for academics: a partial, symbolic harbinger of new pedagogies and practices, and new ways of being a university teacher.

In closing, it is interesting to note that the spectre of the machine is never far from Seb, even in his lectures. While he says his face-to-face teaching has not changed much over 22 years, he admits he has become more reliant in the lecture on new technological 'machines' such as lectern computers and LCD projectors. Even at the lectern, Seb's ultimate fear of the machine confronts him:

The face-to-face hasn't changed to a large degree, what I do except that I ... I mean, I'm dead if the machine's down.

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### **Note**

- [1] The Performer metaphor was articulated by several colleagues in the study, including Ron (performer, model) and Evan (preacher). Some research participants also recognised and drew on the performance metaphor, although other metaphors and images were more meaningful to them in

terms of pedagogic orientation and values. The full range of participant metaphors has been categorised and analysed as similes for teaching: Teaching is like Performance, Management and Direction, Community Service and Care. A fifth non-metaphoric category, Teaching as Facilitation, is also being addressed in the analysis.

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