



## Spatialities and online teaching: To, from and beyond the academy

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“Hello! Is anyone out there?” might be the echo of many an online lecturer, but perhaps a louder echo might be in the question “Hello! Where are you in the educational landscape?” For our locations and spatialities are inevitably entangled with who we are and who we might become. We are always emplaced (Malpas, 1999), and so in the changing pedagogical spaces of academe, I argue that spatialities are inextricably linked with identity performances and teaching practices - these configure and are configured by each other. In the postmodern university, online spaces are changing traditional academic life. As Lefebvre puts it “to change life is to change space; to change space is to change life” (Merrifield, 2000: 173). This paper explores transformations in online teaching in terms of identity, spatiality and online teaching practices in the everyday experiences of online lecturers using the socio-material lens of Actor-Network-Theory. Drawing from a larger qualitative ethnographic study within an Australian university, the experiences of 4 online lecturers are discussed in terms of (re)configurations of their identities, teaching practices and spaces/places (physical and online), as well as their evolving online teaching metaphors; relating to the conference themes of: “What are the changing relationships between people, the virtual and the physical, and objects in the educational technology landscape?”; and “What does it mean to be an online scholar in the educational technology landscape – who, what, when, where, how and why?” (ascilite, 2008). It is concluded that these conceptual and empirical insights can enrich our understanding of online teaching transformations in terms of identity and spatiality in shifting pedagogical landscapes – to, from and beyond the traditional places of the academy.

Keywords: online university teaching, space/place, spatiality, teaching identity, actor-network-theory (ANT), online teaching metaphors, socio-materiality

### The academy in the digital age

As the traditional walls of universities edge ever so much towards digital academe (Dutton, 1996; Dutton & Loader, 2002) and the postmodern university (Raschke, 2002), we witness academic landscapes in flux as online teaching and learning technologies create new emergent environments. With this, come unprecedented possibilities and combinations for online teaching and learning spaces and pedagogies, with emergent shifting teaching practices, spaces and experiences. Despite a nostalgia for the traditional spaces of academia and the face-to-face academic (Brabazon, 2002), these can be juxtaposed with/against utopian views of overcoming digital divides (Bork, 2002) and providing ‘any time/any place/anywhere’ teaching and learning possibilities, the “Martini world” as Goodyear (2006) puts it. Whatever the extent of the shift along nostalgia for the traditional and the longing for a digital future, universities are in processes of change. What we need to consider is “how we as embodied individuals are changed by our experiences in these spaces” (Paechter et al., 2001: 1). We need to also explore the shifting teaching practices linked to the conference themes: “What are the changing relationships between people, the virtual and the physical, and objects in the educational technology landscape?”; and “What does it mean to be an online scholar in the educational technology landscape – who, what, when, where, how and why?” (ASCILITE, 2008). The emergence of new online learning and teaching spaces requires rich interpretive frameworks that seek out the multiplicities and complexities of knowledge practices (Law & Mol, 2002) inherent in universities in the age of “super-complexity” (Barnett, 2000). For as the newly emergent online teaching and learning technologies facilitate movement *from*, *to* and *beyond* the previously bounded traditional academic spaces/places, the boundaries of work and home are being reconfigured, “dismantled,” “renegotiated” and “recreated” (Massey, 2005: 179). Inevitably there may be unsettling rearrangements in the spaces of academia, work and home in our shifting borders, boundaries, connectivity and ICT practices. For “as our ways of using technology continue to dissolve some of the boundaries around different areas of knowledge practices, between our activities in learning, working,

living, community engagement, etc, then oppositions based on such simplifications become less and less tangible.” (Goodyear, 2006: 89). Learning to navigate ways in and through and in-between these spaces requires frameworks that can take into account this complexity and richness.

By invoking a relational (Barad, 2003; Cooper, 2005) perspective using the lens of actor-network-theory (e.g. Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987; Law, 1999; Law & Hassard, 1999; Latour, 1997; Latour, 2005), focusing up complexity through the material, social and spatial becomes possible. Everything comes into being in relation to the other in this world view. “Relations are ... materially heterogeneous.... they are performed, held in place, in a variety of different media: words; bodies; texts; machines; buildings” and so forth (Law, 1999: 7).

Whilst there has been extensive work on the transforming practices and roles of academics using and moving to online environments (e.g. Al-Mahmood & McLoughlin, 2004; Dall’Alba & Barnacle, 2005; Laurillard, 2002; McShane, 2006; Paechter et al., 2001; Edwards & Usher, 2003; Hudson, 2002a, 2002b; Pallof & Pratt, 2001, 2007; Salmon, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, to name a few); to date few studies have taken a relational socio-material perspective to focus up the *spatial* and the *socio-material*, bar a few such as Al-Mahmood (2006), Campbell (2004), Nespore (1994) and Bigum (2001). A socio-material lens can enrich the accounts that emerge by surfacing silent and invisible elements and the implicit practices and politics in the “missing masses” (Latour, 1992) of materials, spaces/places, and objects (Turkle, 2007). Accounts become richer, messy and complex and move from *either/or* to *both/and*; rich descriptions are favoured rather than reduced accounts of the purely technical or the purely social or the purely material, or the purely spatial – this surfaces practices in their complexity. So how then does a relational socio-material perspective shape our thinking about spatiality and identity?

## Identity and spatiality in a relational world view

From a relational perspective, identities are always in a process of becoming. For “identities/entities, the relations ‘between’ them, and the spatiality which is part of them, are all co-constitutive” (Massey, 2005: 10). So according to Massey, identities are emergent and “spatio-temporal”, as “identity may be conceived as an ongoing process of hybridity, in which one’s sense of self is continuously made and re-made” (Massey, 2005: 10). This lends itself to the postmodern notion of identity as shifting and emergent; or as Bayne (2005: 29) puts it, the “postmodern, flexible self”. This means that identities are emergent and performative (e.g. Nash, 2000; Gregson & Rose, 2000; Thrift, 2006). Processes of selving require that “An entity like the self is regarded as a process, something that is done, not as something that simply is” (Jensen, 2001: 72). Identities hence are always emergent hybrids in the way that Crang and Thrift (2000: 9) describe:

... the world has become full of things, objects of all sorts that can be taken up and used to create senses of the self. For example, ... collections of objects offer ways of connecting to other times and places, to shape a sense of ourselves.... Selves do not occur preformed, nor do they even ‘interact’ with the world as though self and world were pre-existing entities rubbing at the edges. Rather selves are created through as Heidegger would have it, being-in-the-world.

And what of the fate of space/place in a relational world view? Indeed, the topic of space/place distinctions is a thesis in itself and beyond the scope of this paper and has been addressed elsewhere (e.g. Al-Mahmood, 2006; Al-Mahmood et al., 2006; Burbules, 2004; Hubbard, Kitchin & Valentine, 2004; Kitchin, 1998; Malpas, 1992; Massey, 2005, to name a few). For the purposes of this paper, I favour the use of space as more abstract and the use of place as those spaces endowed with significance or meaning, but there may be some slippage at times between the terms. In a relational world view, spaces/places are emergent and not predetermined or preformed. They come into being in their enactments. How to deal with the physical/digital spaces becomes the issue, as online teaching and learning spaces (digital and physical) challenge the traditional notions of habituated everyday bounded environments of the academy. Land (2004) notes the complications that are rendered when the “digital page” or university online disrupts the “immured academy” and suggests that cyberspace or online space “remains difficult to define as a learning space” (Land, 2004: 530). And that indeed “Cyberspace could well be a non-space” (Land, 2004: 532), but as I will suggest and show in this study, it can move beyond this notion towards generative multiplicities as online teaching moves from, to and beyond traditional bounded halls of the academy towards emergent hybrid possibilities in the intersections of the physical and digital/online (Leander & McKim, 2003). For Kitchin (1998: 403) aptly highlights that “cyberspaces do not replace geographic spaces, nor do they destroy space and time. Rather, cyberspaces coexist with geographic spaces providing a new layer of virtual sites superimposed over geographic spaces. ... spatial

transformations are affecting social relations while simultaneously social transformations are affecting spatial relations". Consequently 'cyberspace' or online space can be seen as different kinds of spaces as "internally multiple" (Bingham, 1996 cited in Massey, 2005: 91). Massey invites us to consider the relations in these emergent "spatial configurations" (Massey, 2005: 91). It is armed with these definitions and conceptualisations that I move from the theoretical to the practical to describe the study and then discuss four spatial configurations of teaching and identity practices.

## Selecting the online teaching sites: The study design

This research draws from a larger ethnographic study (in a large Australian university) (as part of my PhD work) of 4 fully online postgraduate subject modules with no face-to-face interaction. The qualitative study used ethnography to provide rich data. The overall data collection methods included interviews, participant observation, photographic data and reflection over a period of 6-10 months, with data collected from 24 participants, 19 online postgraduate learners, and 5 teaching staff (2 females and 3 males) with a range of ages and teaching experiences. For the purposes of this paper, I outline some of the interesting spatial configurations of 4 teaching staff only (due to space limitations) based on detailed thematic analysis of their face-to-face in-depth interviews/conversations (each ranging from 1.5-2 hours each), and on in-depth observation of their teaching in the online environments. Interview transcripts were sent to each participant for verification and further reflection, and additional comments and expansions. However, photographs of lecturers' teaching spaces/places were deliberately avoided to maintain anonymity as they would have been identifiable to their colleagues. In the accounts that follow, I show how identity performances, spatiality, and teaching practices are inextricably linked to highlight various emergent hybrid possibilities.

## Spatial configurations: Teaching and identity practices

In what follows, I juxtapose 4 accounts of the configurations of space, identity and teaching practices through selections of some of the evocative and rich in-depth interview conversations with 4 online lecturers, 2 males and 2 females (names have been disguised). I categorise the accounts as an invitation/provocation to (re)conceptualise spaces/places differently. Use of the "( )" within words is to co-implicate multiplicity of meanings in a Derridean sense of the supplement (Derrida, 1976). The "Q" is my voice as researcher.

### Enabling and (re)birthing: From difficult spaces to accessible places?

Barrie: ... I've lost a bit of hearing and I'm not wearing a hearing aid today and I've got hearing aids and usually when I am teaching in a classroom situation I wear a hearing aid. Now one of the things which is much easier for me, particularly with the ESL students, particularly with the students from East Asia, is that they speak very quietly and some of them, there is a cultural thing, they're covering their mouths, and I have a lot of trouble ... hearing the students in class and that might be one of the reasons why I am so wildly enthusiastic about the chat room because I can hear them ... and I say to them... "I can hear what you're saying!" (Q: As in *read* them?) Yes as in *read* them.

Barrie is a lecturer with a vibrant energy and presence. He is a sonorously enthusiastic and passionate lecturer whose years of physical lecturing are transformed into the online medium vibrantly, when he is faced with difficulties hearing in the traditional seminar room. He has a passion for his online subjects, having been an early adopter of the online medium since its early days.

His "wild enthusiasm", as he puts it, is palpable. The translation process of his physical teaching into the online medium is facilitated by technology and text and choice of a quieter physical access space. The accessibility of the online environment frees him from his hearing loss impairment that is becoming limiting and "frustrating" in noisier physical classrooms and with ever increasing softly spoken students. Assemblages of humans, computers, Internet connections, hearing aides, and quiet spaces facilitate Barrie's teaching beyond the limitations of physical classes. These *matter*-ings and their human entanglements help extend his identity beyond a physically *disabling* world to a more enabled one, through the translations of spoken voice to typed text. Barrie's embodied vibrancy is translated into online text through the online subject chat room, and it's his conception of the process as "having a conversation" with his online students that is expansively liberating. Through the digital medium, he is unfettered by the constraints of sounds and hearing.

As I probe his thoughts on the learning/teaching spaces/places further, he ponders reflectively “that it’s a really interesting question” – regarding the notion of *whereness*, and where he feels he is during his online teaching sessions. He elaborates that he doesn’t think in spatial terms about the online subject space, but rather that he conceptualises it as “process”, although he acknowledges that it is an environment. The “*interaction*” is paramount for him and there is a strong sense of the spaces/places in his accounts of the globalised physical locations of his students, in his utterances of the “little town in Cambodia” or that “it’s freezing in Canada”.

The interview segments below indicate that the online chat room space becomes a place of powerful transformation and possibilities for Barrie. His teaching spaces extend beyond the traditional physical academic classrooms and lectures, in which he struggles to hear students as they cover their mouths and speak softly, to online textual spaces that are filled with multiple conversations all of which he can hear! No hearing aides required here! His delight at the vibrancy and aliveness of being able to *hear/read* his students online, and collectively as a group, is significant. He fills his online classrooms with gentle cajoling, banter, and humour to bring difficult material to view and to encourage conversation, understanding, and in-depth explorations. His online students comment on the humour that engages them across their varied professional busy lives that have them studying the online course as part of professional lifelong learning credentialing, and students come to the course globally.

Q: And so Barrie you’ve given me a fairly wonderful description of the online environment, I have a sense of the “space” of this subject, but how would you describe your environment in a nutshell? Do you have a sense of that?

Barrie: Well you’re using interesting language, because I guess I don’t think of it as environment particularly, although you’re dead right it is an environment...

Q: Online space? What would you use?

Q: I don’t think I see it spatially at all... I suppose I see it as process [rather than] than an object, that I see it as the actual interactions that are significant.

Q: So where do you feel you are when you’re actually interacting, do you have a sense of place at all, or maybe not?

Barrie: ... well quite often people will just make some side comment ... I am doing most of my online teaching from home ... because it’s 10 o’clock in the morning and rather than drive up here to get in by 10 o’clock to get through peak hour traffic, I just sit at home and work for a while and log in at home, and just occasionally there’ll be an aside and someone will say, “oh I am looking out the window”, and so I’ve got a sense that Ingrid is sitting in some little town in Cambodia and I am sort of aware of that ....and Liz in Canada has got snow outside and she’s always grizzling about the cold...

Q: And the sense of space for you as the teacher, where’s that? I mean you’re at home physically, do you have sense of...?

Barrie: ...No I don’t think of it like that, I think of it in terms of this is a process, we’re going through it, we’re interacting socially, it’s a very warm feeling, I’m very gregarious, I like that sort of interaction, I feel it’s a sort of social activity, I enjoy the intellectual stuff...

Given the impact and desire that Barrie has for grasping/hearing the full extent of spoken conversation, it seems apt that the metaphor he uses to describe his online teaching in the online medium reflects this when I ask him about it: “... as a conversation with whistles and bells, it’s a conversation that can do things which you can’t do in an ordinary you know single stream of conversation ...”.

The online medium is a crucial mediator in Barrie’s teaching world where mobile texts translate the vibrancy, tones, words and wisdom of his years of teaching and talent to transform dense difficult material into relevant and useful forms that traverse digital worlds. In this case, the online teaching and learning space opens up a new dimension previously unavailable. Enablings here are about places of possibility and accessibility, he moves beyond the limitations of the traditional walls of the classroom towards cyborg (Haraway, 1991) forms - where human, hearing aid and digital and physical spaces combine - to (trans)form into an accessible online teaching place.

## (In)Visible embodying: From impossible spaces to digital embracing?

Pam is a relatively new lecturer to the online medium with a wealth of academic research and professional experience over many years. She has never taught face-to-face as she considers it a “horrible” experience. However, in the fully online teaching medium, she finds a place where she can thrive as an online lecturer \_ for the first time in her life \_ so much so that she has taught 4 times as an online lecturer. Here there is emergence and metamorphosis of a newly found teaching space and voice where she is “pleasantly surprised by the pleasure” of teaching and being online.

In the following face-to-face interview segment, I unfold something of the meditative flow, gentleness and reflective nuances of Pam’s newly found teaching possibility of a different sort – to a place previously unavailable. Her initiation into the online teaching subject was as a replacement while the usual subject lecturer was away, as she had extensive research expertise and knowledge skill in the subject content. This was her fourth go at teaching online after she significantly revamped and updated materials in preparation. She was most open and generous and thought deeply about the process of having me research two of her online subjects as part of my research sites. Further, the interview experience also served as an enriching reflective space for her, which becomes apparent as the interview segments reveal.

Q: ... how did you find the experience for you [online teaching], you said you were pleasantly surprised by the pleasure in it and that you had in fact found a medium that you can deal with that works for you ... it seems to work for your students. Can you maybe expand a little bit more on that in relation to the invisibility, the physical invisibility?

Pam: Oh yes. I have great hang-ups about my physical presence. I don’t think very quickly on my feet when I’m nervous, so standing in front of a class is actually torture or giving a talk is something I don’t enjoy, I try to forget about what I look like and just focus on what I’m doing. With this medium [online] it’s like, you can imagine the person on the other end to be whatever you want, there’s constraints around what they look like, who they are, all this sort of thing, and that in a sense frees me up to be the sort of person I want to be ...

Pam’s online classes are small and ideal, about 4-8 people, and she would not want 30 or 40 online students as she points out: “I don’t know that I would be capable of making it work...but I keep saying that I never wanted to teach, but I’ve really found the one thing I can do”. For Pam the online teaching process is not about embodying the role of “a teacher standing in front of a class”, but rather to “give people this great experience” which she can do online. As she highlights:

... yes I really don’t think it’s a medium that I would feel ever very comfortable in and I’ve watched people teach as distinct from being in class, and it seems to me that they have a very real sense of what it means to have a sense of a teacher standing in front of class, I don’t have that, I never desired to that ...but this [online teaching], I can, if I can give people this great experience about x [de-identified subject content], and I’ve got 4 people out there whose feedback seems to indicate that they had a damn good time, then that’s really powerful and it’s really satisfying...

Here, the possibilities of spaces/places that are opened up are perhaps unusual, as they are beyond the more general process of moving/migrating from face-to-face teaching to online teaching. There is an unexpected emergence of a practice site in a purely online teaching space – its *onliness* quivering with (im)possibilities. This account highlights the potentialities and affordances that online spaces have for academics and researchers who may shun or shy away from traditional face-to-face teaching. The power of simultaneous absence of a physical classroom and presence of an online space helps configure emergent places, evolving new practices beyond the traditional halls of the academy.

And what Pam creates is this *imagined* classroom of her online subject environment:

... I guess I felt it was a room, it really was, and everyone would have their own windows. I think actually the guy in Gippsland talked about the view that he had, and I’m not sure if the one in New Zealand didn’t either, but there was a real sense that everyone was sitting at their window in this space doing their work, and they would intermittently go off to other places, because their jobs were such that they travelled, especially the chap in Queensland, who was wonderful he sat in the room looked at all the work that he had to do and then went out on his field trips and tried to relate the work to his field trips ... so I had this sense

of people coming to this much nicer room, it was a sunny room and even though they're in different spaces and places, it's still like one, big huge space...

Interestingly, for Pam there is no risk involved in teaching in the online medium compared to face-to-face. This contrasts with Dreyfus's (2001) view that privileges face-to-face teaching and learning over the online mode, where both the teacher and student take risks by being proximate and copresent (Dreyfus 2001: 91). Land (2004: 157) also alludes to the risk of being online and the ruptures to "the many risks to identity, confidence, emotional security and esteem encountered on a daily basis by participants in online learning environments". The delight with which Pam describes the metaphor for her online teaching bellies the depth of her reflective thinking about the transformative and heightened power of her experience in the online teaching medium.

Pam: hmmm... a metaphor? Sunny is the only thing that comes to mind ... It's like windows I guess, a very very light room with all these windows, but that's sort of slightly wrong, it's a bit confused I guess, I see the space, no I don't see it as that; it's like I imagine people inside this sunny... windows... in a room with windows but they're sitting inside the room. I'm not sure if I am in there actually. I am not sure if I put myself inside that space, it's like I sit outside and look in and then they come in for bit of space and then go off.... It's just this huge light space with windows, and people sit at the windows and do their work and then go off into their other life ...

Q: ... and so for you ... your other life, when you're leaving that online space as a teacher, do you leave that online space altogether or is it something that's carried with you?

Pam: I think I leave it, I don't ever feel for myself that I am actually inside that space, I am outside it, almost being voyeuristic in a sense, but I have to. It's like ok, it's exactly like, when you're counselling you have a virtual space between yourself and the other person and you have to project into that space and engage that person, but you never physically ever go into it, or very rarely, cross into it. Even when you're sitting face-to-face, you wouldn't encroach on the space, but there's very much a sense of ... meeting of minds ... and that's it, it's like a meeting of minds inside the space...

It is the online spatial configurations of invisible online embodiment that configure Pam's emergent teaching role, and her sense of finally finding the "one thing" she can really do. For Pam, the opportunity of having a teaching space that is accessible, and liberating, so to speak, is a most rewarding and powerful experience. Her reflective words as she recounts and reminisces about her online teaching experiences during our interview, say much: "Ah it's ...one of the most powerful experiences I've had for a very long time". What this online teaching medium has created for Pam is the "liveliness of space" (Massey, 2005: 189) and its "possibility of surprise" (Massey, 2005: 105).

### **Mobilising and (dis)locating: From possible spaces to intensified places?**

Brian is a wonderfully engaging and vibrant face-to-face lecturer who relishes the embodied interactions of face-to-face teaching. He has had however, many years of online teaching experience for pragmatic reasons. So whilst the online teaching mode is not his preferred mode or style, he refers to the purely pragmatic reason that online courses must be offered.

It was a pragmatic thing .... it was a completely pragmatic thing. There were students out there, we had students contacting us from Alice Springs saying, "I would like to do... the x [de-identified] subject, but I live in Alice Springs, what can I do?"; and so we were simply responding to a need and having done that, the question then becomes well how can you do it adequately, what is the best way of doing it?

In Brian's account it is by taking on the perspective of a distant student that forms a major part of his role in being instrumental for courses to be offered online in his faculty, despite the loss of embodied presence. His physical and online students and colleagues have 24x7 access to him, and even though the online medium limits his physical presence and proximity to his students, emails maintain his connectivity and translate his vibrancy, or at least attempt to do so.

In Brian's busy lecturing and research schedule and academic global travel, the flexibility of access enables subject delivery and response from almost anywhere given the appropriate machines and connections. He is rarely ever out of reach from email wherever he is in the world. His commitment to

one-to-one email responses to each and every one of his students, online and offline, shows his extraordinary dedication. He has significant numbers with one of his online subjects having about 40 enrolled students. He highlights the heightened awareness and knowing of his online students compared to his students in his face-to-face:

... the online teaching learning experience is in some way precarious, second-hand, half-hearted, virtual. I could make a case that I know my online students in more detail than I know my face-to-face students. They... don't lose themselves in the crowd in the way that a lecture theatre of 65 students [do], you know, which faces sort of leap out at you; with online delivery you are obliged to respond to every individual as individuals; you're obliged to customise your responses to their needs, not to some sort of generalised perception of the class difficulties; and so you could argue that far from being a sort of a remote impersonal interaction, which is probably the glib description, in fact it's more personal, more individual, more immediate than a face-to-face whole lecture...

However, this heightened intensified interaction online does have its pitfalls, as he points out:

...I think people probably project their preferred teaching styles more online, perhaps their preferred teaching styles are more evident online where the context is so constrained than it is in even other media. Because of the value that I place on interacting with the students one-on-one, I suspect that I am the most inefficient online lecturer that you can possibly imagine because I have set-up a system where every student submits directly to me their own work and receives personal feedback from me on that work. Now that is inefficient beyond belief, but it also means that you get to know the students particularly well; and I was having an email exchange with one of the students after the course and we were talking about this, the fact that they can air concerns that are highly specific to their intended research area in a degree of detail that they would never have the opportunity to do in a whole lecture group, you know, they could never dominate the floor as it were in the way that you can in an email.

In addition to his in-depth tailored and individualised email responses to his students, the following snapshot provides a glimpse into his ubiquitous response practices and locations, both at his home and when he is overseas.

... at home or maybe, that's not true, if I am overseas then it's, I might lock myself away in the hotel room and download all the emails, work through them; so download all the emails, log off, work through all the emails, all the work the students have submitted; then log back on again and send off all the replies. But the goal is to reply, you know you can't reply the same day, but the goal is to reply the same week... so if the students sends a piece of work I think they should reasonably expect a reply that week.

Remarkably the maximum time that Brian is out of email contact is for 5 days a year! As he points out:

...Probably the longest I have been out of email contact this year will be five days and that was because I was staying at a convent... I had no online access, I didn't even have an outgoing phone... in Europe, and for five days I didn't have any email access... Well the thing was ... when I came home I had 485 emails!

Brian's preferred mode of working is "Almost inevitably late at night because then I can concentrate", he says. He is aware of the flexibility of learning online and many of his students' adaptation to it:

... nonetheless some people clearly, based on the emails that we get, well that I get, clearly like online; you know, they actually get a kick out of the fact that they can switch off, go and make a cup of tea, think for a little while and pace themselves. You know, and so you could delve through the emails we've got and find many different people who have said that it was such a surprise to discover how they adapted to online learning, but you will find other people who find it hugely frustrating.

For Brian, empathising through the *skin* of his students, so to speak, allows him to support the online medium despite its limitations. His is a pragmatic empathy based on addressing course access for students across time and space; sentiments echoed by many professional workers who choose online study as a pragmatic choice to accommodate the demands of busy lives across spatio-temporal locales.

And somehow my questions about his home spaces reveal one of the silent invisible entities/masses when I ask: “And so when you are responding at home, do you have a sort of space for your computer or laptop?” His response poignantly captures the liveliness of his laptop and dynamism invested in its materiality (Turkle, 2007) that sustains and fosters his student and collegial links, as he comments, “It [the laptop] follows me round the house wherever I happen to be. Mostly in the sun room but it’s wherever I am doing whatever work needs to be done...”.

And for Brian his metaphor evocatively captures his online teaching practices:

I think it’s somewhere between having dozens of simultaneous conversations and playing dozens of multiple games of chess simultaneously, because you really do! Everyone who sends you an email assumes you have perfect recall of their last submission, and you don’t of course, and you have to go back and read the damn things again, but they’ll say, “you know as I said in my last, you know, I’m studying such and such”...I really think the parallel with playing multiple games of chess is a very good one ...

Brian’s accounts highlight the multiplicity, intensity and hybridity of online/physical spaces/places.

### **Quarantining boundaries: From possible spaces to impossible places?**

And finally, Sam is another vibrant and experienced face-to-face lecturer who loves her face-to-face subjects and courses, but has a totally opposing experience in her online teaching subjects. Her metaphor about her online teaching experiences just about sums it up:

... A groan, a groan, a groan, a groan! I actually have to grit my teeth to go onto them [online subjects] because I don’t enjoy this form of teaching particularly, so I think argh it’s Thursday afternoon... argh I better get in and see the onliners; whereas I never ever feel that about the face-to-face teaching, where in fact I am quite excited and I’m teaching this evening and like it, whereas as I say I have to take three deep breaths before I sit down to the machine!

For her the limitations of the text are significant in that she says:

It can’t convey me very well! ...Yes well actually I think, online, I’m fairly boring. I respond, I try to raise it a bit, but it’s nothing like my face-to-face where you can have a joke and where I do a lot more, you can see I talk a lot but as I don’t write a lot, I feel I can’t convey me very well, down in writing...

She further highlights the problems of typing and text:

... Well I find it tiring to type, it still doesn’t, although I am not a bad typist, but it still doesn’t come terribly easily ...and that’s the other thing, I never send anything out because I’ve always got to reread it and make sure it’s correct and makes sense, because it’s also not very good to convey [anything] ungrammatical; well I mean if you’re a lecturer at university, you’ve got to come out as somebody who knows something...

And yet the online medium provides a surprising source of useful transparency and accountability in Sam’s experience with a particular incident she describes:

... and you can track me down you can see how I respond to you, you can see from the dates it goes 13th, 20th, 27th, absolutely to the week, because it all started in one of the earlier years where there was this cry there was no support, and the Dean, I don’t know, there was some letter that went to the Dean and he came to me and said, “what’s been going on?”, and luckily I kept all the email log and I was able to furnish him with all the contact and of course he then said, he laughed and said: “well she [the student] doesn’t have a leg to stand on here”, but I made these mechanisms now so that you can actually see that I’ve been in to every entry every week...

Here there is no issue with Foucaultian surveillance, as in the panopticon (Foucault, 1976), or cyber surveillance (Poster, 2001), as the permanent archiving of the digital online class is seen as a practice of importance that evidences lecturers’ performances and transparency.



Given Pam's dislike of the online mode, she is meticulously careful to quarantine her time and access space to her physical work space at the university where she goes online at the same time every week so that students know that is when she will view their responses and provide feedback and interaction. She constructs clear boundaries and separations between her physical home and professional online spaces/places, whilst maintaining the separation of her face-to-face professional and collegial spaces/places. Yet even so, she maintains a large cohort of online students in ever popular online courses as a departmental and institutional requirement that blend her online students and offline students in the same class lists! Hers is a way, "To live, to know and to practice in the complexities of tension" (Law, 1999: 12) and the demands of the academy to provide online courses globally, albeit amidst the groans and tolerances of "argh"!

### **(Re)configuring the academy: Habitations, hauntings and (be)longings**

The various accounts of online teaching show the (im)possibilities that are brought to view using a relational lens to highlight how material-spatial-social patterns arise. The multiple enactments of online teaching, identity transformations and spatiality highlight how spaces/places come to *matter*; and how *stuff* configures spaces/places so that they are constantly (re)made and (re)assembled (Sheller & Urry, 2006). In online teaching, "place is instantaneously pluralized" (Moore, 2004; Moore, 2005). It is in the intersections of *fixity* of physical spaces/places along with the *fluid* possibilities of digital and physical spaces/places that multiple hybrid enactments emerge. These ensembles composed of architecture, texts, machines, people, artifacts and more, show socio-material configurations of humans and non-humans that "enable humans and materials to move and hold their shape as they move across various regions" (Hannam, Sheller & Urry 2006: 14). Implicit throughout these online teaching accounts is the power of machines in boundary makings; at times providing thresholds for crossing through, from, to, into, and beyond; at others, opening up worlds and possibilities. These theoretical conceptualisations and empirical analyses can help online scholars, educators, researchers, philosophers, and educational designers to view spaces/places as dynamic and emergent (slow, fast, ethereal, imaginary, liberating, stabilising, quarantining, focusing, bounded, luminous, ...). They come to *be* and *breathe*; they *configure* and *are configured* according to the ensembles of human and material entanglements. They are never simply *fixed* but implicated in complex networks of humans and non-human *matterings*.

Our universities are being reconfigured and are configuring of us in who we become and how we teach as online educators in the new spaces/places of the digital academy. In this milieu, we need to find a new language to describe emergent online teaching landscapes that consider "emotional geographies" (Crouch, 2000; Bondi et al., 2005 cited in Hannam, Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 14). It is for typologies that enrich our accounts of spatiality, online teaching practices and identity formations that I suggest we aim – nuanced in the multiple attenuations that spatiality has to offer – from the spaces/places of hope, (be)longings, hauntings, enticements – to those that compel, blur, illuminate and mobilise us towards empathic, accessible and new imaginaries. In our inevitable emplacements, emergent identities and online teaching practices demand that we are always, "inevitably, making spaces and places", that shape our identities of becoming (Massey, 2005: 175). In the emergent educational landscapes, *where* and *how* we (*re*)place and (*re*)space ourselves as academics is a new frontier that must be navigated and explored further, as we move from the traditional boundaries of the university towards the ever increasing digital academe; for inevitably, *who* we are and *who* we might become are inextricably linked to being *somewhere* – always emplaced!

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