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Problematizing Global Knowledge and the New Encyclopaedia Project

An Introduction

Mike Featherstone and Couze Venn

Theory, Culture & Society will commemorate its 25th anniversary in 2007. This provides us with the opportunity to reflect on the project of a journal committed to theorizing culture and society. Since its inception the journal has endeavoured to promote and debate innovative or challenging theory, for example, in special issues and sections devoted to postmodernism, globalization, reflexive modernization, digitalization, multiculturalism, performativity, vitalism, complexity and so on. As to be expected, the prime focus has been on theorizing culture and society in the context of profound changes in the contemporary world, and the emergence of new interdisciplinary fields of study in the social sciences and humanities. Nevertheless, even though ‘the new’ and ‘progress’ have been subjected to persistent critique in the pages of this journal, we need to reflect more on the relevance and impact of our theorizations in the circuits of global knowledge. This raises questions not only about the authority of our formulations, but also about the addressee. The analysis of the globalization of culture and knowledge has been a central concern of the journal, yet it is also important to give greater consideration to our participation in the globalization of a western-centric knowledge. This is especially the case if we remain confident that the theorizations we feature are necessarily legitimated because they are the latest, and by corollary the most advanced.

In this special issue we seek to refocus attention on these questions and address the topic of the globalization of knowledge and its critique. As will become clearer in this introduction, the development of the New Encyclopaedia Project has enabled us to think through these issues about the production and circulation of knowledge in a way which opens up a more dialogical space of engagement with different globalizing knowledges and their modes of authorization. In considering these questions, we are trying to use, in what we hope proves to be a new way, an old form, namely, the encyclopaedia. A great deal of discussion and experimentation has gone into both the epistemological and the practical problems of how to reactivate this form as a forum for critique and for the production of new knowledge that would reflect the plurality of perspectives and interests that emerge in the flux of globalization and digitalization. Our overall goal is to open up the process of production and authorization of knowledge to greater questioning, along with the generation of new agendas for research that are sensitive to the broader questions of relevance, authority and public education.

The Problem of Global Knowledge

As we move into the 21st century, it is clear that the boundaries, limits and classification of our world are shifting. Cultures no longer seem to have the same level of stability as before – or at least as they are depicted in our theories. The uncertainty as to what we should know in the face of an enlarged world has become crystallized through the processes of globalization and digitalization.

The first, *globalization*, suggests that an important effect of the integration of the global economy within the framework of capitalism has been the clashing of cultures. From a number
of points of view, it may well be the case that we increasingly live in ‘one world’, but many contradictory processes are taking place: not just the extension of English as the language of business, commercial law and international non-governmental organizations, but also the visibility of different cultures and traditions and the need on the part of less powerful nations and groups to assert their diversity. We are becoming increasingly aware of different accounts of global history and various alternative modernities. Western accounts of the rise of modern times and the classification systems used in the social sciences and humanities are becoming challenged by counter-knowledges. This suggests we have to abandon many of the universalistic assumptions that underlie these systems, for example about linear temporality and progress, and instead start from a perspective which emphasizes global variability, global connectivity and global inter-communication.1

The second process, digitalization, points to the capacity of the new information technologies to store and retrieve vast amounts of data. Yet to have all the cultural representations and texts of the world immediately at hand in this format raises the problem of the structure and classification of the world. This is especially so when many different forms and types of knowledge can be put into a vast database which can be traversed through hyperlinks and search engines. Yet who should construct the databases, hyperlinks and search engines: the state, the corporations, the university? A sort of order is emerging with the Internet, yet it is driven by many different and conflicting principles and interests, with the commercial dot.com economy currently in the ascendant. We therefore have a problem about how to classify, handle and access digital culture.

The title of this volume, ‘Problematizing Global Knowledge’, indicates our commitment to address these changes in terms of their consequences for knowledge. On one level these linked processes can be seen as the extension of a particular type of knowledge which aspires to become a global standard. In a similar manner to the way the Internet and intranets play an important role in netting together business activities and the financial markets through the global flows of information which legitimate a certain type of knowledge, academic and intellectual knowledge can be seen as subjected to similar processes.

If we examine the social sciences and humanities, there has frequently been the assumption that they were producing universal generic knowledge – valid for human beings in all times and places. But it was clear that this knowledge was the product of a particular place – historically Europe, or ‘the West’. Yet more recently the idea of a more relational sense of conceptual formation has been proposed. Colonialism needs to be seen as a key element in the global space which defines what Europe is (Pagden, 1993) and is allowed to do. In effect, following Chakrabarty (2000: 17), there is the need to ‘provincialize Europe’:

The problem of capitalist modernity cannot any longer be seen simply as a sociological problem of historical transition (as in the famous ‘transition debates’ in European history) but a problem of translation, as well. There was a time – before scholarship itself became globalized – when the process of translating diverse forms, practices, and understanding of life into universalist political-theoretical categories of deeply European origin seemed to most social scientists as an unproblematic proposition. That which was considered an analytical category (such as capital) was understood to have transcended the fragment of European history in which it may have originated.

It is important that the problematization of knowledge does not repeat the denigration or silencing of non-western knowledge that has been the mark of a certain universalizing Occidentalism (Moore, 1996; Venn, 2000). A long history of social science’s inability to grant epistemological equality to non-western knowledge and experience sustains the persistence of an attitude that still regards the others’ world as deficient in some fundamental way. It legitimizes the not so subtle imposition of diagnoses, based upon economic and sociological theories and assumptions, of what ails the ‘Third World’ when it ‘fails’ to show signs of catching up with the standards set in the West to measure factors like wealth creation, education, way of life and so on. Mbembe has established the extent to which the ‘extraordinary poverty’ of the
corpus of social scientific knowledge concerning Africa has to do with the fact that ‘[M]ore than any other region, Africa thus stands out as the supreme receptacle of the West’s obsession with, and circular discourse about, the facts of “absence”, “lack”, and “non-being”, of identity and difference, of negativeness – in short, of nothingness’ (2001: 4). Equally debilitating is the hold that western knowledge has on experts internationally, globalized in the form of the social engineering advocated by international NGOs like the World Bank and WTO and disseminated through countless courses in universities across the world, where the knowledge is taught as authoritative and universally valid.

Against this current in globalized knowledge, we would point to the extent to which a longer history of knowledge uncovers its diasporic character, demonstrating that cross-cultural borrowings and grafts are intrinsic to its formation in any culture or period. Thus a genealogy of medicine, agriculture, mathematics or navigational and writing technologies shows the extent to which knowledge developed in one culture or part of the world, like the Arabic, the Chinese or South Asian, crossed over into European and Greek science, often operating as one key condition of possibility for the later developments (Goonatilake, 1998; Harding, 1998).

One of the effects of European colonialism and the differential emergence of modernity is that such genealogies can no longer be confined to territories and cultures. Indeed, as Mbembe points out about the effects of European occupation of African societies, ‘[F]rom a narrow methodological standpoint, this means that, from the fifteenth century, there is no longer a “distinctive historicity” of these societies, one not embedded in times and rhythms heavily conditioned by European domination’ (2001: 9). Today, knowledge communities are even more diasporic and dispersed, and theory travels even more swiftly across cultural zones, though the problem for a democratization of knowledge remains that of the relative dominance of particular centres and authorizing procedures that continue to favour a specific western perspective; this situation underlies our argument for a radical de-centring of habitual conceptual frameworks.

History, then, should be seen as more spatial and relational. Societies cannot be studied in isolation, for they form a reference group knitted together through a wide range of exchanges and flows of information, goods and knowledge. But this does not mean each nation has an equal capacity to influence others. Nation-states and societies are embedded in a series of unequal power balances, and clearly the United States and Western Europe command vastly superior intellectual and academic resource bases and firepower. Hence the flows are generally seen as one way, from the more advanced ‘superior’ western centres to the rest. This suggests that we need to extend Appadurai’s (1990) notion of global flows to the academic community itself. According to Sakai (2001: v), global academic and intellectual information can be seen as two distinctive flows:

The first is a centripetal flow of ‘raw’ and particularistic factual data from peripheral sites to various metropolitan centres ‘in the West.’ The second is a centrifugal flow of information about how to classify domains of knowledge, how to evaluate given empirical data, how to negotiate with the variety and incommensurability which is inherent in the body of empirical data from the peripheries, and how to render intelligible the details and trivia coming from particular peripheral sites to ‘a Western audience.’ Academic information of this second kind is generally called ‘theory’ and, in contrast to the particularistic nature of the first kind, it is believed to be universalistic and hostile to the presumption that only those who are involved in the locale can tell what it is that they are concerned with.

This situation means that if non-western scholars are to gain prestige and legitimate themselves, they are obliged to join the patronage networks which stem from the West. It can produce an orthodox mindset which non-western scholars are eager to accept. If global history must be spatial and relational, as many authors have pointed out, then there is potential for an alternative account of processes addressing not only our understanding of global history and culture, but academic history and culture too. The rise of the power potential of East Asia has complicated this process and is leading to a revision of Eurocentric theories of the rise of global
history (see Gunder Frank, 1998; Hobson, 2004; Pieterse, this issue; Pomeranz, 2000, who point to the considerable revisionist literature on the Middle East and other parts of Asia). While such works challenge the European exceptionalist views of Weber and Marx and their 20th- and 21st-century supporters, they have had relatively little impact on mainstream social science scholarship in the West. Yet they provide the basis for the development of counter-knowledges which can stimulate the establishment of alternative academic prestige networks which can encourage a new generation to reconstitute the global archive of knowledge and open up new research pathways.

The question of problematization thus needs to make use of a range of approaches in order to both uncover the mechanisms and processes constituting global knowledge as well as begin the construction of an alternative corpus that would support different forms of sociality. Some of these conceptual tools are familiar, for example, as deployed in the notion of critique, including the critique of ideology, that has a long history in the discourse of modernity. We have indicated already other approaches, namely genealogy and deconstruction. It is important that we add those of ethnography and a longue durée cross-cultural history – that is to say, it is important that problematization includes reference to how people actually live and make sense of their lives in different parts of the world, and that these processes be considered in the light of an historicity that recognizes the ‘multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities’ (Mbembe, 2001: 9) and the complex and uneven temporalities that characterize change in any region. Problematization therefore ideally involves both critique and the production of a different archive of knowledge.

The potential constitution of the global archive of knowledge is in the first place a bringing together of the different knowledges of the world into the same space. A good deal has been written about the potential of digitalization to create such an archive, by scanning in the material in the various national and independent libraries and archives in order to achieve flexible search and recovery of documents. In one sense the contemporary ‘archive fever’ and ‘storage mania’ are driven by the new technological possibilities of digitalization which offer greater ease to document, record, store and retrieve material (see Featherstone, 2000, and the entry on archive in this issue). Yet while it is possible to search the digital archive (which includes the Internet via the various search engines such as Google), there is the tendency to view the technology as somehow neutral, as if the shift from the pen to the typewriter to the personal computer has no impact on the process of writing and self-formation (see Hayles, 1999). Different inscription systems and types of storage device used clearly have a major impact on the nature and type of knowledge produced (Kittler, 1990). To oversimplify we can view this in terms of changes in form and content, with the inscription and storage devices changing the form. But the form is not neutral, it opens up new worlds and possibilities.

The capacity to reconstitute the archive leads not just to increased extensivity – through the increased availability of newly recorded knowledge ‘at the fingertips’ – but also to increased intensivity, the qualitative shift into new forms of knowledge through encountering new metaphors and tropes. It has been suggested that theory in science originates in and relies on metaphors (Hesse, 1970). The largest source of metaphors around the world is Asia, especially India, China, Tibet. South Asia, for example, has one of the largest repositories of literature in the world. Yet, unfortunately, in recent years, the education of South Asian scholars totally neglects this tradition. But these accumulated writings in the various languages, literatures, philosophy and mathematics employ a vast range of epistemological and ontological positions which could be most stimulating for generating new discoveries and concept formation in the academy and the sciences. For example in Kerala, South India, there existed a strong tradition of mathematics and astronomy, and it is estimated that over 100,000 manuscripts have survived. Yet a recent Sourcebook of Indian Astronomy only listed 285 works (Goonatilake, 1998: 255). Estimates of all the Indian manuscripts available today in all languages are 500 million. The particular globalizing economy which the world is embarking upon itself, ironically, values South Indian knowledge experts in Bangalore and other places where computer programmes and other aspects of the information economy are out-sourced. This is not just a
question of favouring innovation and short-term economic gain over long-term scope of conservation of knowledge, it is to argue that the two are linked, that creative innovation frequently depends upon the exploration of that which is not close at hand. This also reminds us that, in the long term, ideas which contemporary scholars regard as failures and judge obsolete often re-emerge at later points in history. In the long term we need a sense of the traditions of knowledge around the world if we are to build an effective global archive for humanity, which would become a sort of global database, acting as a potential reservoir for generating new theories, new concepts and classification of knowledge. Such an archive would make problematic existing scholarly classifications, and usher in a de-classificatory mood. The question arises whether we are at a particular historical juncture at which the speed of knowledge delivery systems through digitalization is extending the de-classificatory attitude, or whether we are merely turning over the raw material from which new classifications emerge. At the same time, however much some would argue that we are being propelled into a world in which generative structures, flows and flux outpace classifications and our old typological mode of theorizing and require more contingent processual knowledge forms, the process of education itself demands learning processes which work off maps and classifications. Historically, when there has been the sense that the world itself is being remade and that too much new knowledge is emerging at a pace too difficult to assimilate, there has been the need for practical handbooks, with encyclopaedias one of the most successful forms.

So, the new encyclopaedia today has the potential to be both archive and a device for classifying and de-classifying knowledges and objects of the world. The new technologies mean that greater fluidity can be introduced in the process of searching databases, enabling the forging of new pathways in reading transversally across disciplines and types of data. This would connect with new research methods that make greater use of serendipity and are less circumscribed within disciplinary boundaries. There are implications in these arguments for a new form of archival hospitality, subversive of disciplinary and access restrictions, and new strategies for learning, and thus new educational processes that need to be invented and taught.

Yet neither an encyclopaedia nor an archive simply appears: an immense labour, largely invisible in the background, yields the data in a storable form, whether in the form of writing or computer storage systems. A central problem about memory arises here: what should we consider worth preserving or passing on, and in what forms can this inheritance be best preserved? Not everything can be digitized. Here we think of performance and music, the rituals of everyday living, that is, everything that has embodied and spatial density which varies in its performative enactment. Furthermore, the book still remains the cheapest, most accessible and most versatile resource for learning and thinking, especially when one considers that the production and operation of computers requires vast amounts of raw materials, resources that poorer countries cannot easily afford. These issues are made more complicated today because of the tie-up between problems of storage and access with questions of intellectual property rights and digital rights management that result in new restrictions and inequalities of access. The problematization of knowledge cannot avoid these wider and longer-term issues that bring to the fore questions of responsibility and ethics.

Encyclopaedias and Classification

The term encyclopaedia is generally thought of as indicating a device which systematically organizes knowledge of a known, or knowable world. The extensiveness and comprehensiveness of the phenomena classified can be seen to legitimate the world: because the multifarious aspects of the world have been documented and summarized, then the world can be taken to exist. An encyclopaedia is a flexible type of ordering somewhere between a system and a list. Many of the entries refer to each other in a coherent way and could be extracted to reconstruct a systematic disciplinary order, such as, for example, the discipline of physics. Indeed, this was one of the features and selling points of early popular encyclopaedias, such as Chambers Cyclopaedia. Encyclopaedias, in short, are devices for concisely assembling, classifying and indexing vast amounts of knowledge about the known world. They have a long history
and can be found throughout the world in many cultural and civilizational traditions. Islam had a long history of encyclopaedias, with the Arab encyclopaedia tradition going back at least as far as the 10th century to the work of Ibn Qutayba. The Chinese encyclopaedia tradition is particularly interesting in terms both of the scope of some of the massive projects and the nature of the classification systems involved. 2 項目 Leishu, or Chinese encyclopaedias, have enjoyed a central position within Chinese literature and raise many questions not only about the exhaustiveness of the compilations, but also the extent to which the translation of Leishu as encyclopaedia is adequate for the very different pedagogic system with its mode of knowledge construction and transfer (Hahn, 2000; Kaderas, 1996).

In the western tradition4 perhaps the most famous encyclopaedia has been the Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des Sciences, des Arts, et des Métiers (1751–65), edited by Diderot and D’Alembert. Indeed it was sought as the key book of the Enlightenment. This and earlier encyclopaedias, such as Ephraim Chambers’ Cyclopaedia (1728), were addressed to a burgeoning literary public who looked for some authoritative and clear statements of the new expanding field of scientific and practical knowledge.5 Indeed, in France the Encyclopédie came to be regarded as a rallying point for the more cosmopolitan philosophes against the academies sponsored by the King. The new forms of communication helped to begin to bind together a scattered readership into ‘a republic of letters’. Diderot envisaged a voluntary association of individuals responsible for the production of the encyclopaedia, which also suggests a wide public readership. Eighteenth-century encyclopaedias were aimed at a public without geographical or denominational limitations. This was a cosmopolitan ideal which informed much of European Enlightenment culture: the ideal of transportable knowledge across national boundaries, with individuals of whatever social status able to participate in a universal conversation (Yeo, 2001: 56).

The Encyclopédie not only became a bestseller in France, but helped to generate a large public interest elsewhere in Europe, demonstrating the appeal of the Enlightenment to the upper and middle classes (Darnton, 1979: 528). It contained contributions from many eminent scholars and scientists of the day (including Condorcet, d’Holbach, Montesquieu, Necker, Rousseau, Turgot and Voltaire) and was built around the idea of an exhaustive classification, ordering and connection of human knowledge. It is something which it was assumed would produce benefits for humanity, with social and human engineering potentially following scientific description and classification.

Diderot and the philosophes, then, had the dream of recording all knowledge; Diderot remarked that he wanted:

to collect all knowledge scattered over the face of the earth, to present its general outlines and structure to the men with whom we live, and to transmit this to those who will come after us, so that the work of the past centuries may be useful to the following centuries, that our children, by becoming more educated, may at the same time become more virtuous and happier, and that we may not die without having deserved well of the human race.

Yet Diderot was also aware that the Encyclopédie was a response to a period of intellectual ferment and that the attempt to provide a sort of ‘counter-academy’ which would provide a resource for generations to come ran up against the problem of time, as it sought to cope with the explosion of new knowledge (Rosenberg, 2001). Important here is not just the use of the encyclopaedia as a dictionary of new scientific terms, a forum for new theories, often unorthodox or challenging, or a reference manual or handbook of modernity, but also the way in which the availability of this information and its initial piecemeal subscription format helped stimulate public discussion and dialogue. So the encyclopaedia could be used by the public to provide information, to update people on some new technique, scientific discovery or newly discovered and classified flora or fauna. At the same time it appealed to a public discovering its appetite for public education, the potential to express and discuss new knowledge in an informed and critical manner. In short the Encyclopédie can be seen as an important intervention in the establishment of a European civil society in which free discussion, dialogue, tolerance and
questions of cultural rights became emergent. Also important was the public/market synthesis of the project and the ways in which this tradition tried to resist monopolization and authoritarian control, through the appeal to and invention of an informed public. Significantly, it became the target of censorship.

The cosmopolitan intentions of the encyclopaedists gave way to the construction of encyclopaedias within the cultural policies and national projects of nation-states, with first the appearance of *Britannica* in the late 18th century. The focus on biography and history in *Britannica* meant that it not only functioned as a dictionary of arts and sciences, as did earlier encyclopaedias, but it aligned encyclopaedias as one of the new devices for the invention of national culture and traditions. Thus, with the emergent re-figuration of European nations as nation-states, which rapidly became locked into a series of intensifying struggles in the 19th and 20th centuries, the role of encyclopaedias expanded from the selection and presentation of valued knowledge to help in the constitution of national imaginaries. With the independence of colonies in the second half of the 20th century, several new nation-states engaged in their own version of this process and developed their own encyclopaedias. Yet one of the aporias was that often the intention was to retain the modernizing potential and include scientific and technological content, while seeking to embed it within a different cultural framework. There were prototypes in those countries which had escaped European colonization and had modernized more on their own terms, such as Meiji Japan in which the Japanese encyclopaedia became a systematic handbook of state-led modernization and invented tradition. Independent ex-colonial states such as India regarded encyclopaedias as practical handbooks for modernity, a guide to the expanding world of science and technological developments, juxtaposed with attempts to reinvent traditions and develop a new national culture. This was also the case with the Soviet Union and The People’s Republic of China, as they sought to widen the scope for practical everyday scientific, technical and civil knowledge, presented in the form of an alternative world, albeit a world to come. The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union were accompanied by a wave of new encyclopaedia building. The recent publication of encyclopaedias in Eastern Europe and Russia confirms again the importance of the encyclopaedia as a sign of sovereignty and independence at the beginning of a new wave of democratization and the assertion of national identity.

While many post-Second World War nation-states are still engaged in a process of state formation and invention of national cultures, this process has become more difficult to sustain in the face of the current phase of globalization over the last two decades. This has not only resulted in the opening up of markets and the emergence of packaged global education, it has also seen significant shifts in intellectual and academic life, especially in the social sciences and humanities (postmodernism and postcolonialism being symptoms of this shift). As we have noted, there has been an increasing interrogation of the largely European-based conceptual armoury and classification system of knowledge and much of its content, along with a renewed interest in cosmopolitan forms of knowledge. In the light of the recognition of cultures as fundamentally hybrid and syncretic assemblages, shaped by the diasporic movements of peoples, knowledges, technologies and everyday practices, there has also been a contestation of the presentation of cultures as integrated, located and bounded entities. These shifts inside the academy have been bolstered by the movements towards greater global integration through communications technologies such as the Internet and the emergence of a nascent global civil society (via the activities of international non-governmental organizations and internationally organized protests against economic globalization which have brought into being the World Social Forum and other bodies). They have significant implications for how one is to reconstitute the encyclopaedia today, and how it would function in relation to this emergent global ‘public sphere’.

**Anti-encyclopaedias: Encyclopaedias Are Good to Think with...**

It is clear from our arguments that encyclopaedias are devices for ordering the world in a particular way; this is because the way in which they seek to provide an exhaustive listing of...
every relevant phenomenon in the known world and show the way they are linked together assumes, as well as institutes, an underlying order. Classification is at the heart of this enterprise of order-giving and sustaining. Yet every classification system is haunted by its exclusions, separations and forced hierarchies, its conversion of fluid emergent processes and events into stable categories. This has proved to be fascinating for those in the arts: what better way to show the absurdity and contingency of our world order than to provide an alternative classification.

One of the oft-cited examples of this arbitrariness is Jorge Luis Borges’ discussion of ‘a certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ entitled the ‘Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge’. He tells us that

In its remote pages it is written that the animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.

Borges’ Chinese encyclopaedia is bewildering and disturbing in its capacity to challenge us to ‘try and think the world in terms of this if you can’. Yet as we see in the discussion of actual Chinese encyclopaedias (see note 3), the example Borges cites can be seen as only stretching the classifications actually used in Chinese history. His classifications may well seem bizarre and strange from the perspective of modern scientized culture, which tends to see the world in terms of categories such as viruses, bacteria, insects, reptiles, fish, mammals, primates, humans, etc. This is because Borges questions all the various constructs and interpretations we impose upon reality: the ordering of the universe will continue to escape us because the classification systems we use cannot help but be shot through with contingency and arbitrariness and derive from customary practice. This perspective is very much in tune with that of the later Wittgenstein who abandoned his earlier search for a prepositional language in which the logic of terms could be shown to accurately correspond to or picture reality, in favour of the view that language is the fabric of our world (see Johnson, 1997). But Borges goes further in the destabilization of our world by suggesting in his fictions the way ‘the world out there’ is shot through with other strange worlds, which operate on very different metaphysical principles. He does so in a form which crosses between, on the one hand, a short story with its authorial narrative and, on the other, an essay in which there is some attempt to make sense and marshal an argument to deal logically with a series of strange occurrences and phenomena which invade and disturb our categories through the glimpses they provide of the very different order of the fabulous other world. One of the most powerful statements of the glimpses of such an alternative world is provided through a fictional encyclopaedia, The First Encyclopaedia of Tlön, discussed in Borges’ (1999a) fictional essay ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’.8

As both Roy Boyne and Maria Esther Maciel emphasize in their pieces on classification in this issue, another important literary figure to be fascinated by the act of classification was Georges Perec, who developed a number of amusing systems of classification to illustrate the great temptation inscribed in the idea of viewing the whole world in terms of a single code, although at the same time we know that this doesn’t work and will never work.9 The challenge to ‘think the world’ through an improbable set of categories is also central to Georges Bataille, Michel Leiris, Marcel Griaule, Carl Einstein and Robert Desnos’ (1995) Encyclopædia Acephalica. This ‘headless encyclopaedia’, an encyclopaedia produced without an ordering principle or classificatory hierarchies, was put together largely in Paris in the 1930s and 1940s by writers associated with the Acéphale and Surrealist groups, including people from the College de Sociologie.10 This attempt to produce an encyclopaedia of heterology, with its love of the formless, and heteronomism, produced many amusing and astonishing formulations. The encyclopaedia (a compilation from a Critical Dictionary edited by Bataille and related texts, which runs to just over 140 pages and includes numerous full-page photographs and images)
included entries on: Big Toe, Civilization, Eye, Formless, Gunshot, Hygiene, Ju-Ju, Man, Mouth, Nightingale, Reptiles, Skyscraper, Slaughterhouse and Spittle. Another contemporary example is the ‘encyclopaedic cinema’ of Peter Greenaway who remarks that he loves to create his own systems in the form of lists and found the categories of the Borges Chinese encyclopaedia ‘healthy’ (Maciel, forthcoming 2006). This move away from narrative form to a list, series or catalogue plays with continuity and discontinuity.

The encyclopaedia, then, for many, is the epitome of order, a classificatory device which relies on the alphabetical list to pull together entries that substantiate a world, entries which can be linked together into various subject areas such as disciplines to provide a systematic introduction to a topic. Yet this principle of orderly disciplinary reconstruction belies a number of features of the encyclopaedia which make it less of a clear and visible tree of knowledge and more of a subterranean rhizome. This feature has been seized on by recent anti-encyclopaedists who seek to subvert the enterprise of worlding and show its contingency, arbitrariness and limitlessness. This is a point made by Umberto Eco who, remarking on the ‘unlimited semiosis’ of the encyclopaedia, even compared it to Deleuze’s rhizome, in which every point connects with any other.

According to Eco, the encyclopaedia, contrary to the intentions of Enlightenment thinkers, does not reflect an ordered universe in a univocal and rational way, but supplies rules which are generally myopic and only agree with some provisional criterion of order. In effect, encyclopaedias attempt to give meaning to a disordered world whose criteria of order escape us (Eco, 1999: 337; Maciel, forthcoming 2006). This contrasts with the type of order produced by the dictionary, which works to register the properties of words in a succinct manner. Encyclopaedic competence, on the contrary, excludes the possibility of hierarchizing the semantic marks, the linguistic properties and the semes in a single, uncontroversial way in its endeavour to map the life of a culture as a system of inter-semiotic systems.

If we consider the encyclopaedia form as having the potential to pull towards ordered taxonomy, but also towards the opposite pole of incompleteness, then it is a form which becomes relevant for our age. It is consistent with the view that challenges the drive to construct a permanent order of culture in which one is sure of what to put in and what to leave out, and sure of the boundaries between cultures. It could be argued that hypertext has the potential to deliver this mobility into the middle of the encyclopaedia enterprise. Indeed, the links at the end of entries, the various charts on how to read and join-up entries to make introductory textbooks etc. – the ordering impulse – is at the same time a potentially disordering impulse, threatening to take the reader off into the delights of serendipity. It is this dual characteristic of encyclopaedias, of ordering and disordering knowledge and the world, of limiting connections as well as multiplying them, which interests us in this issue and in the larger project.

Emergent Publics, Information and the Archive

These concerns resonate with the longer-term interests we have had in Theory, Culture & Society to theorize emergent social and cultural change, manifest in the attention we have given over the last 20 years to: postmodernism, global culture, reflexive modernization, complexity theory, vitalism, and so on. As Karin Knorr Cetina (2005) remarks, both the new global terrorism and the global markets challenge our habitual modes of social science analysis and can best be understood via complexity theory with its emphasis on the major imbalances between cause and effect, unpredictable outcomes, and self-organizing, emergent structures. This contrasts with the earlier dreams of social science to produce general explanations and the achievement of expert control. The management of uncertainty, task predictability and orderly performances were much easier to facilitate in the ‘relatively complex’ organizations of modern industrial societies. It can be added that it seemed far easier to understand the latter in terms of modes of classification derived from the natural sciences. The emphasis upon a spatial arrangement where stability was thought to reside in fixed categories and traditions, relatively separated and distanced from one another, favoured the use of stable social science classifications
and the spatial arrangement of knowledge based upon the model of natural history, as noted by Foucault (1970) and others. The interest of the modern form of governance on normalization and regulation within fixed boundaries of social order pre-disposed social scientific knowledge to focus on the orderable and to neglect everything else as noise or incidental. Today’s emphasis upon flows, flux, speed and the movement of things into a global far-from-equilibrium state of affairs clearly produces difficulties for any practical ordering of knowledge. This is the world of non-linear dynamics we referred to earlier, mentioned by Ulrich Beck (2002) with his plea for a rethinking of social epistemology to produce a cosmopolitan social science in response to the changes in the ontology of the social based on the emergence of the global. Yet although many share his sense of unease with the inappropriateness of continuing to draw on the conceptual armoury of existing social science categories, not everyone shares his optimism that a new cosmopolitan social science can be constructed.

This also translates into a tension between the educative impulse, which puts a premium on the need to provide some sense of rudimentary conceptual order and clarity in order to teach social science today, and the theoretical impulse, directed towards the theorization of the implications of the emergent global and technological tendencies. Yet, as we have argued, the encyclopaedia form is well suited for tackling these different aims and prospective audiences for re-thinking global knowledge. At the same time, this potential to experiment with the encyclopaedic form has not been evident in the expansion of the numbers of encyclopaedias produced in recent years. One of the most ambitious academic encyclopaedias has been the recent 26-volume Elsevier *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2001) which contains over 4000 articles commissioned by 52 section editors. Organizational, the encyclopaedia seems to have adopted a conventional pyramid structure with commissioning editors appointed to oversee traditional disciplinary domains: sociology, economics, political science, law, anthropology, etc., who in turn commission contributors. Entry writers tend to have been seen as authorities, experts who could put their ‘stamp’ of validity on to knowledge. The large number of editors and advisors listed were drawn primarily from the United States and Europe, with a small sprinkling of non-western scholars.

A diametric contrast would be *Wikipedia*, a free Internet encyclopaedia in which entries can be written by anyone who so wishes. This openness and de-authorization of the cult of experts is coupled with an open editing system: anyone can over-write an entry. While there is a clear gain in open public participation and dialogue about entries, with the *Wikipedia* conceived as an open site constantly being built, re-built and dismantled, the minimal central editing and open invitation to rewrite is burdened with problems of validity. The need to validate a trustworthy source can be seen as part of a more general problem about the knowledge people take from the Internet. Yet, like the Elsevier encyclopaedia, *Wikipedia* is low on inter-disciplinarity and innovation, since it follows traditional disciplinary divisions which tend to favour the reproduction of knowledge. A key question, then, is how to encourage greater flexibility in the evaluation process whilst resisting existing patronage networks, knowledge monopolies and the reproduction of established classifications. We need to find practical ways to avoid one-way flows of global knowledge in the form of ‘theory’ from dominant centres, which franchise sub-centres and representatives around the world. Important here is the encouragement of innovation and the incorporation of knowledge which doesn’t fit existing classifications. From our perspective, as we contemplate the construction of digital archives, with hypertext links and speed of search and access, the challenge is to understand the medium. That is, we cannot assume the Internet or a notional global digital encyclopaedia to be a neutral content delivery system.

In addition to the need to theorize the emergent global public sphere, with the clashing of different knowledges and cultures along with all the difficulties that analysts of multiculturalism and the formation of an appropriate education for global citizens have alluded to, there is the question of how far a public sphere grounded in a shared common stock of knowledge available in digitalized form is possible. It can be assumed that this would be a long way from the type of bourgeois public sphere identified by Jürgen Habermas (1989). In the Habermasian
model of the public sphere, the pull is towards the communicative rationality of the ideal speech situation in which rhetoric, affect and body aesthetics are meant to be filtered out to allow the force of the better argument to become recognized. If a public involves self-organizing open communication amongst strangers, then there may be many emergent forms of public life (Calhoun, 2002). Rather than the model of the global public sphere, it can be argued that it would be more appropriate to think of ‘global public life’, with the displacement of the term ‘sphere’ by the term ‘life’ suggesting the difficulty of separating politics and aesthetics, and cognition and affect. The accent on life, furthermore, points to the potential for information to be conceived as *alive*, as an autopoietic system, or as a complex multiplicity which does not necessarily behave and act as a docile tool but rather is worlding, inventive and generative. A different notion of information is at stake here, in opposition to the conventional view of its neutrality and factuality. Rather, information can be conceptualized as *puissance*, that is, as extensor or producer of capabilities, so that it is relocated within an ontology that regards human beings as prosthetic, technical beings inhabiting informational worlds.

One could thus say that people don’t just use digital archives, rather they increasingly inhabit a different informational society which is a digital archive (Brouwer and Mulder, 2003). The digital databases have the capacity to operate in ways which go beyond the ordered grids, knowledge-trees and hierarchies of traditional means of accessing information in libraries and archives. In principle at least, digital archives offer new levels of flexibility and instability and a non-linearity which favours unexpected transversal connections and hypertext jumps which have the potential to offer creative insights and inventions. The New Encyclopaedia Project aims to both investigate and take advantage of this potential for producing creative informational networks, though this requires an education or apprenticeship into new ways of thinking and being, and the provision of new knowledges and critical perspectives, an issue we discuss in the final section.

If we think less of global public sphere and more of global public life, then a key dimension of this life works through digital systems such as the Internet. Increasingly the Internet offers not only new layout and graphics for text along with mobility between sites, but also images, pop-ups and video-clips. It must be admitted that educational activity on the Internet is but a tiny percentage compared to the use of sites that provide trading, pornography, gambling, and chatting or blogging, and downloading music. Additionally, the commodification of knowledge restricts what knowledge can belong to the public domain. Nevertheless an expanding part of the learning experience of a new generation of students is being filtered through this new media form, although relatively few academics have shown an interest in theorizing and thinking through the implications of this process. In this context, we need to take seriously the arguments of those like Maurizio Lazzarato (forthcoming) who seek to investigate the affective and aesthetic character of immaterial labour and the ways in which this is associated with the centrality of visual and informational innovation and invention in contemporary capitalism. Lazzarato argues that video registers this new form of informational digital capitalism most clearly and focuses on the way in which it produces subjectivity not primarily in language, but rather in duration and the body. His argument is that video has the capacity to affect the brain without necessarily passing through explicit forms of representation. According to his theory, video technologies work in real time on perception through delaying, contracting, accelerating, to translate fluxes inaccessible to human perception into images to provide access to a new aesthetic dimension. The editable and reconstitutable video-image points to a shift from representation to the constitution of the world, to the generation of aesthetic assemblages which suggest video and digital technologies take us beyond simulational television culture to reveal new possibilities for invention (see discussion in Toscano, forthcoming). This means, for Lazzarato, that capital has freed time from the repetition of the present (habit/custom) and from the repetition of the past (memory/tradition) to produce a new ontology of time and power, a multiple time of creation and invention.

Whilst there are many problems with this attempt to re-think the relationship of production, technology, time and being post-Marx and post-Gutenberg, it puts on the agenda the
mobility of this relationship and draws attention to what is emergent in present conditions with the shift to ‘immaterial labour’ and to the different functioning of affect in corporate global capitalism and the new, de-centred and de-territorialized, and in some sense virtual apparatus of rule which characterizes Empire. For Negri (2003), the key move in Marx’s theory of ‘the real subsumption of labour by capital’ – and thus in his theory of value – is the theorization of technology within the conceptual limits of labour power, and thus ultimately within the purview of exchange value within capitalism. This approach neglects the understanding of being as both technical-being and as being-in-time, an understanding that at one level relates technics to time (Stiegler, 1998) and at another level relates cognition to affect. If Lazzarato is correct about contemporary capital’s freeing of time from the repetition of the past, one must then take seriously the implication that this short-circuiting of time by capital abolishes the time of the collective and allows the veil of visuality to obscure the collaborative and cumulative nature of work, preventing its coming-into-view, as Arendt might say. A problem then arises as to the process of liberation – the time to come of the creation of a new being out of the productive cooperation of the multitude, in Negri’s (2003) and Lazzarato’s analyses. For Negri the break with the pre-Einsteinian, and Marxist, concept of time and its relation to production and value implies that ‘time cannot be presented as measure, but must rather be presented as the global phenomenological fabric, as base, substance and flow of production in its entirety’ (2003: 29). In his development of an alternative view, one which conceptualizes time as multiplicity and as linked to collectivity (Negri notes this view in the Chinese tradition) and as what ‘changes the past into the future’ (Borges cited in Negri, 2003: 31), he argues for an ontological paradigm of time, namely, as ‘the fabric of the whole of being’ (2003: 34), and being as temporal being (the reference to Heidegger is explicit in Negri). So the move is towards an idea of constitution and becoming, of decay and invention.

Whilst Negri works through the problems of futurity through the analysis of antagonism – and there are other analytics of the relation of technology, time and the production and mutability of life (for example, Grosz, 2004; Massumi, 2002) – we would like to highlight the point of view of anticipation and orientation in considering the within-timeliness of being, that is, the attention to historicity that considers that our past does not so much ‘follow along’ as ‘go ahead’ in its tending-towards (Heidegger, 1987: 41). One implication – following still the standpoint of being as a becoming – is that what has been is operative, as equipment, as memory, as tradition, as trace, in the present. Globalization introduces a new scale in this process, involving knowledge and its accumulation as memory and potentiality on a world scale. This suggests the enlargement of the archive to include marginalized or dissident knowledges, along with its continual incorporation and reactivation in the search for new ways of being.

The statement that ‘behind all scholarly research stands the archive’ now encounters the fact that the archive in question is becoming the global archive. It is also becoming a digitalized archive, one in which the past records and artefacts are not only subject to digitalization but one in which life is ‘lived under the gaze of the digital will to archive’ (a sort of complicit *Truman Show* existence). Yet one of the interfaces for the archive is the encyclopaedia. In this special issue we are not just seeking to problematize global knowledge but arguing that the relationship between the archive and the encyclopaedia is also unstable and that the space between the archive and the encyclopaedia is worthy of investigation.

**Encyclopaedic Explorations**

In thinking through the structure of the current special issue and the project at large there are a number of key issues which have emerged.

**The New Encyclopaedia Project**

The first is the scope and boundaries of the volume and the larger project. The usual way to make an encyclopaedia is to appoint senior editors to gather together discipline editors who make lists based upon the classifications which are seen as relevant. The encyclopaedia device of A–Z listing allows for an expandable series in which material which does not fit the usual
categories can be inserted. It is this exhaustiveness, to potentially be able to find some preliminary information on an unknown item, however obscure, which is part of their appeal. At the same time, there is also often the facility for a disciplinary reassembly of concepts: the using of special index guides to disciplines which provide reading-order lists, which could enable the reader to construct an introductory textbook from the material. In the early days of the project, along with colleagues and postgraduates at Nottingham Trent University, we began by looking at encyclopaedia entry listings in order to think through both the structuring of the authorized knowledge in use and the major absences and exclusions which became apparent if we tried to think more globally. This Sisyphean task was soon abandoned in favour of the focus on clusters, which proved to be a useful initial solution to both the problems of scope and relevance. In effect, it made us focus down from the exhaustive mega-list, to start from where we were located in time and space and the set of conceptual issues with which we were familiar through our interests and work in Theory, Culture & Society. Cluster topics such as the media, megacities, consumer culture, religion and food offered the potential of a relatively circumscribed ‘middle range’ set of topics. Each cluster topic could be addressed as a separate assemblage, which could be thought through in an inter-disciplinary manner. Clusters could be addressed via the excavation of various genealogies along with the delineation of the various interests which have sought to stake out and impose a particular set of classifications, an order of knowledge. The spatial ordering of the knowledge production of the particular cluster topic – the location, direction and intensity of knowledge transmission routes and media around the world, along with their power potential and legitimation processes – was also seen as a significant aspect.

The advantages here are in terms of the problematization of conventional modes of addressing a cluster topic. But also in terms of a potentially deliverable project, which should be centrally seen as a research project, not a book-keeping, data-gathering exercise. Important here is the practical side of the project, the way in which the delineation of the various dimensions of the cluster topic has been addressed in workshops, colloquia and extended editorial group meetings in various parts of the world. If we are arguing for a more dialogical form of global knowledge, then we have to begin the dialogue in our own research and writing practices. It is also important to emphasize that the New Encyclopaedia Project is a project, something experimental and in process. The construction of an encyclopaedia of global knowledge is an unbalanced dream worthy of a Borges piece. Yet, rather than completeness and the aporias of remaking the Library of Babel, we would emphasize the essential unfinished and unfinishable nature of the project. The New Encyclopaedia Project should be seen as more of an encyclopaedia in ruins than a bright, shiny new city of knowledge. Or better, the structure is something akin to the megacity (one of our next cluster topics) in its mixture of forms and generation of unexpected emergent qualities and domains, which defy definitive mapping.

**The Structure of the Current Issue**

Second, the current issue on Problematizing Global Knowledge, which is the first volume of the project, should, therefore, be regarded as a prototype which exemplifies these structural dilemmas. In proposing a problematization, we are trying both to draw from the different traditions of critique, recognizing the different stakes for the politics of knowledge across the globe, as well as experiment with new techniques and cross-disciplinary analytical tools. This experimental apparatus is put into practice in this special issue through a structure that works at three interrelated levels. In the first place we have considered knowledge in terms of the broader epistemological framework that determines or circumscribes its production, namely the meta-concepts and meta-narratives that come to operate as foundations or generative ground for any particular corpus of knowledge, to which we have added the need to make visible the sites at which knowledge is variously produced, authorized, disseminated and inserted into a public arena. These three sections – meta-concepts, meta-narratives and meta-sites and institutions – form the major guiding classification within which we can
endeavour to rethink global knowledge. The idea here in highlighting these broad categories is to indicate that principles and assumptions outside particular specialisms, for example an idea of modernity and scientific objectivity and their association with a secular foundation, invariably function as part of the epistemological protocols that determine what kind of arguments may be admissible in establishing legitimate knowledge in any particular discursive formation. Furthermore, broad categories like gender and race have effects right across specialisms. We have tried to encourage contributors, as much as possible, to make these effects visible in the writing of entries and supplements.

At the same time, the sets provide a device for indicating affinities and contrast amongst the material collected; they are recognizable topics, for example, religion, the university, embodiment, science, that refer to areas of debate and concern amongst an informed public. Additionally, this ordering has allowed the editorial team to insert cross-disciplinary approaches within the structure itself. More could clearly have been done here, but we were limited by both space and time. For instance, several of the sets – media, library, hospital, nature, nation are obvious ones – are ‘under construction’. So the entries and supplements in any one set are meant to be indicative of the aims, and to trigger the thought of other possible items that would more fully fill out the sets.

The Supplement

Third, we have sought to guide contributors in the writing of entries and supplements by providing them with a number of documents which outline the project aims and spell out how it differs from a conventional encyclopaedia. We have sought to encourage the writing of entries which have a wider sense of disciplinary and classificatory formation and can provide a sense of the struggles out of which apparently secure conceptual order emerged. The intention has been not to encourage contributors to write as authorities, but more to de-authorize by making visible the contested processual basis of knowledge formation. This should be coupled with an awareness of alternative genealogies, counter-memories and stoppages in the formation of particular conceptual lines.

A key form here is the use of supplements, which should not be considered as dilettantish remnants but more as prisms which make visible another possible configuration of the concept or way in which the entry could have been written. The use of supplements is important, as the logic of the supplement can be said to manifest the critical logic of the project, in so far as it lays bare the relationship between the field of knowledge and the frameworks through which that field is continuously produced. It also points to the unfinished, incomplete nature of entry writing which we have mentioned and is central to the structure of the New Encyclopaedia Project. Indeed, a tension is thus instituted between the entry and its supplements, although within the scope of the new encyclopaedia entries are not proposed as authoritative statements which summarize the latest state of knowledge about specific topics, but already have begun the work of problematization and de-hierarchization.

The supplement thus provides the space for making visible the absence-presence of what has been erased, marginalized, covered over or misrecognized in the emergence of the dominant gaze. This may not entail a direct dialogue and contestation of the entry – for example in the ‘history of the victors’ with regard to elite historiography, or the way a dominant paradigm consigns previous approaches to a history of error as its lapsed or out-of-date past, the way Occidentalist accounts of knowledge discount the contributions from other cultures that were nevertheless constitutive, or the way cognitivism in the sciences side-lines the affective dimension of existence. More generally, the supplement reveals a lack at the heart of any discourse that attempts to establish itself as self-sufficient or that presents its authority as sovereign or immanently present, as plenitude; this lack nevertheless remains as trace (of a necessary deferral), or of the forgetting of a constitutive ‘outside’ or excess, that deconstructive work brings to the surface. It is also the place where debates regarding approaches and method can be presented to guide the reader. It is thus a point of departure, and can be of more significance than the entry from the point of view of innovation. In the hardback edition
of this issue, which will follow shortly, we have tried to further subvert a sense of fixed structure by inserting quotes and images that open up alternative themes and configurations. In effect, we have sought to supplement the supplements.

The Encyclomedia to Come?

Fourth, the exploration of lines of connection is something which is central to a digital version of the project, something made possible through hypertext. We are only just beginning to think what an encyclopaedia can do. Perhaps, as we mentioned earlier, we need a new term to point to the increased mobility in working the space between the encyclopaedia and the archive. In some ways what is emergent is more of an encyclomedia – a circling, returning and spiralling through knowledge in many different connective forms. At the same time we have a degree of ambivalence about the use of this new term. The term loses the ‘pedia’, the educative aspect, with its connotations of ethical education and forming of the person. In addition, media can cut a number of ways, indicate both extension, the availability of more information, which can mean more facts at the finger tips through new media such as the Internet; but also intensity, the qualitative shifts of levels, the shock of new connections and opening up of new directions/dimensions for creative invention.

Encyclomedia could well operate as a useful additional term to encyclopaedia, pointing to the creative exploration of the space between the archive and the encyclopaedia. The social and cultural sciences today have to deal with mediated everyday life and public institutions, which suggests that the media are both a topic and a resource. It is something academics need to study and theorize to make sense of the contemporary world. Yet they are also something we use in the form of writing and researching devices, and increasingly in teaching and seminars with multimedia presentations to students and colleagues involving images, sound, music, diagrams, video. This centrality of the media points to a number of significant aspects. First, there is creative research practice: the need to learn how to handle and navigate the enlarged archive of academic material (the potential global archive, or inter-archive drawing on the world’s digitalized libraries and archives). Second, the analysis of the expanding public and private storage systems, the ‘storage-mania’ in which ordinary people, as well as corporations, institutions and collectivities, purchase, collect, record, catalogue, classify, edit and store material in digital format (via iPods, webcams, mobile phone photos and clips etc.), as well as exchanging and publishing material in new formats, including Internet sites. The archivist surfaces from curating dusty cardboard boxes in the depths of the library basement into the everyday surveillance and recording of the world illuminated by the light of thousands of screens. This is the dream of the world of ubiquitous media, with embedded communications chips to make all spatial locations smart environments.

Digital media enable us to think beyond the book, or the working desktop covered with piles of opened books, journals and photocopies as our writing resource base, to the screen with its own virtual desktop, writing space or ‘window’ and Internet connections. Or better, it points to our various modes of to-ing and fro-ing between the two modalities. It is important we attempt to theorize this new process of knowledge formation both in the possibilities for research and writing and also in the presentation of material. This is one of the central aims of the New Encyclopaedia Project. It is important that we explore ways of showing the process of knowledge formation. There is still the tendency to regard an article or book as a finished object, when of course we know this is not the case. There is also the tendency to focus on and interpret the final object, but we know from the accounts of the lives of artists, writers, poets etc. that there are many illuminating turns in the process in which earlier draft material can be seen as of equal significance to the ‘final’ result. There is an interest in the process of drafting, researching, discarding and recovery of ‘rubbish’. Matisse, for example, devoted over a hundred sittings to one portrait, which underwent many radical transformations, which reportedly made the sitter weep over the disappearance of earlier renditions, now forever lost (see Antliff, 1999: 199). With digital recording devices and digital writing and editing devices it is possible for this process of knowledge formation to be made more
readily available, despite the caveats about capturing performance and the everyday mentioned earlier. An article can be linked to its own archive of related material and earlier drafts, as well as inter-archiving to cited material and sources. It is something of this capacity for the Internet that Tim Berners-Lee (1999) had in mind when he envisaged the Internet as a free-net where we could hypertext jump across to every text, before the intellectual property rights and click-and-purchase merchants moved in. Yet something of this still remains possible, and we can envisage the experience of researching and reading becoming less of a linear exercise, with more scoping in and out of a range of related (distant) texts. If the knowledge unit of production for academics ceases to be an object (the book, or article) and more an unstable field, festooned in links and accompanied by its own set of para-sites and commentaries, then the alleged linearity of writing and the alleged integrity of the author, the authority of the author, could potentially diminish in significance.

In the NEP we are seeking to explore some of the dimensions of this process of knowledge formation by experimenting with a prototype which takes its point of departure from the encyclopaedia. The continuum we seek to move along ranges from the creative and innovative dimensions of research and writing we have mentioned above, to the necessity of teaching and writing in succinct and accessible ways, given the responsibility to teach students and be understood by the general public. We would argue that the encyclopaedia, and especially the digital encyclopaedia linked to the archive we have discussed, is a useful device for focusing on the importance of both ends of the continuum.

Notes

1. An implication is the need to move away from the ‘one epistemological size fits all’ standpoint of conventional social theory, and to search for alternative theorizations more responsive both to developments in other fields and to different assessments of previously marginalized knowledges. It may well be that the work of problematization in these changed circumstances should start with the concept of the ‘West’ itself, and the dichotomies it inscribes between the western and the non-western, the modern and the non-modern. There was a time when these dichotomies had a productive purchase on categorizing, and indeed constituting, differences in values and ways of life, expressed in terms of notions of tradition and modernity or development and underdevelopment. But globalization not only disrupts all such dichotomies, it has brought to the fore processes of exchange and interaction that are obscured by the older conceptual framework. It has also made visible, against the thesis of the ‘clash of civilizations’, the heterogeneity and hybridity of cultures and the effects of diasporic movements, which should caution us against reconstituting differences in terms of essentialisms. So problematizing has to do with de-centring such categories and the generation of new approaches in theory (see Therborn, 2000, on global inter-communication).

2. Other important compilations were the *al-Hanafi*, in Persian (1524), the encyclopaedia of arts and sciences, composed in Arabic and translated into Turkish by Tashköprüzade (1495–1561), and the *Kashf az-zanum* (Dissipation of Doubts) composed by the Ottoman scholar Haji Khalifa, which eventually filtered through to the West and became a major source for d’Herbert’s *Bibliothèque orientale* (Burke, 1996: 202–3). These encyclopaedias circulated in manuscript form and not print, hence their availability was restricted. In the Ottoman Empire, the sale of non-religious books in Arabic was permitted, but these had to be imported from the West until the early 18th century when the first press was established in Istanbul.

3. The Chinese encyclopaedia tradition goes back to the Han Dynasty (2nd century BC) with the *Erh-ya*, the oldest known Chinese dictionary. The first encyclopaedia appears to have been the *Hyang-lan* (Mirror for the Emperor, 220 AD). It is interesting to note that the expression ‘emperor’s mirror’ is similar to the term ‘speculum’, which was frequently used in the titles of encyclopaedias in medieval Europe (Bauer, 1966: 677). This and other encyclopaedias, such as the *Pien-chu* (Pearls of Literature, 7th century) and *Pei-t’ang shu-ch’ao* (Excerpts from Books in the Northern Hall), produced by Yu Shihnan (558–638), used a similar category system to the *Erh-ya*, involving 19 categories such as the emperor and imperial princes, the empress and imperial consorts, the art of government, music, home life and body care, ships, food and drink, etc. (It is this classification system which is parodied in a fantastic way in the Borges short story about ‘a certain Chinese encyclopaedia’ which is used by Foucault to begin his discussion in *The Order of Things.* In the Song Dynasty (960–1280), a period of cultural stability in which the Confucian bureaucracy with its
examination system was strengthened, encyclopaedias flourished. One important work was the T'ai-ping yen-lan (Emperor’s Mirror from the Era ‘Greater Peace’), compiled by a committee under the direction of Li Fang. The table of contents is listed under 55 main categories, with over 5000 headings and 12,000 chapters. The intention was to place the whole literary and scientific knowledge of the period in abbreviated form in a single work. In the Ming period (1368–1644) this endeavour was massively exceeded by the Yung-lo ta-tien (Greater Handbook of the Era ‘Eternal Joy’), which had the aim of assembling in a single handbook the entire sum of Chinese writings for posterity. A rough draft, the Wen-hsien ta-ch’eng (Great Collection of Literature and Holy Writ), was composed by a committee of 2169 scholars, and was a giant work planned to consist of 22,900 chapters in 11,000 volumes (Bauer, 1966: 685). The text was written out in preparation for printing, but abandoned due to cost. Today only 855 chapters remain, less than 4 per cent of the original. One encyclopaedia which did survive was the Chi’in-ting ku-chin t’u-shu chi-ch’eng (Collection of Pictures and Writings from Antiquity and the Modern Period Compiled by Imperial Command, 1725), which ran to 852,408 pages in its first edition.

4. In the western tradition, encyclopaedia meant ‘encyclolical education’, derived from the Greek word meaning ‘the circle of learning’ in the arts and sciences, as found in Plato’s Academy in Athens with his notion of the full education that he believed every intelligent young man should undertake. In ancient Rome, the older Pliny’s Historia Naturalis (AD 77) has been referred to as ‘the first of the vast encyclopaedias’ (Collison, 1964: 21). This started with a volume of contents and sources, followed by 36 volumes dealing with cosmography, geography, ethnography, anthropology, physiology, zoology, botany, medicine, metallurgy and a history of fine arts (Steinberg, 1951: 6). Encyclopaedias sought to provide an all-round education within the bounds of a single work and were organized in the way of a system. In effect they offered ‘do-it-yourself courses’ (Burke, 1996: 195) or a handbook. The high Middle Ages has been referred to as ‘the apex of encyclopaedism’, a time in which a complete collection of all knowledge still seemed a realizable dream (Yeo, 2001: 5).

5. The Encyclopédie, which was seen as the great textual embodiment and symbol of the Enlightenment, was acknowledged in the prospectus of 1750 as being impossible without Chambers. Indeed the initial plan had been to produce a translation of Chambers’ work, but Diderot and d’Alembert in the end envisaged a grander work with entries by famous scholars. They also reworked or took directly many articles from the 2-volume Cyclopaedia (Lough, 1980). The Encyclopédie ran to 35 volumes (including 11 volumes of plates, a 2-volume index and a supplement of 5 volumes). By the time the first volume was published 2000 people had subscribed, doubling to 4000 with the publication of the final 10 volumes (Collison, 1964).

6. This culminated in the 28-volume Dai-Hyakujiten (Great Encyclopaedia) published by Heibonsha in instalments between 1931 and 1935.

7. This process began in the 1930s prior to independence, stimulated by the need to provide a counter-history to that of the British Imperial rulers. It has continued down to The Indian Encyclopaedia: Biographical, Historical, Religious, Administrative, Ethnological, Commercial and Scientific, edited by Subodh Kapoor (New Delhi, Cosmo, 2002), and the massive 110-volume Encyclopaedia Indica: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, editor-in-chief S.S. Shashi (New Delhi, 1998).

8. In the brief section on language and literature it was noted that ‘the literature of Uqbar was one of fantasy’ and that its epics and legends never referred to reality, but to the imaginary region of Tlön, in contrast to our materialist view of the world of things and linguistic emphasis upon stable states and nouns, provides an idealist world, as all the planet’s languages and thought presuppose a world that ‘is not a conourse of objects in space; it is a heterogeneous series of independent acts’. This world is ‘successive and temporal, not spatial’, consequently the language contains no nouns, but ‘impersonal verbs, modified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) with adverbial value’.

9. Linnaeus, who established the basis of modern taxonomy in the 18th century, constantly ran up against the problem of ‘the unclassifiable’ to the extent that his contemporaries complained of the ‘volatility’ of his model, the various editions of Systema Naturae (1735), which changed in the face of his constant discovery of new diversity in the animal world demanding new zoological differences that would not fit into the pre-existing categories (see Maciel, this issue). See also the discussion of
15. The New Encyclopaedia Project has been under way since 2001 and colloquia have been held at:

14. This is evident in one of the earliest attempts, H.G. Wells' ‘World Brain’, in the 1930s, which argues

10. It is interesting to note that Walter Benjamin participated in the College de Sociologie in the 1930s.

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Linnaeus by Manuel DeLanda (2002: 42), who criticizes this way of forming biological taxonomies,
with its aim to reconstruct a fixed and continuous natural order. Rather, he argues we should reject
static categories and essences and focus on species as historically constituted individuals.

10. It is interesting to note that Walter Benjamin participated in the College de Sociologie in the 1930s.

His major unfinished work, *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin, 2000), reflects a good deal on the
problem of devising a theoretical frame for handling and classifying the multiplicity and labyrinthine
character of Paris. In the end, Benjamin opted for the arbitrary ‘degree zero’ of classification of the
alphabet, which he used to label the various cardboard boxes he used to collect his bric-a-brac of
cuttings, photographs, images, handwritten notes, leaflets, magazines, tickets and handbills which
provided the traces of the popular culture of the city which he sought to order in a way which let the
fragments speak and deliver their half-intelligible allegories (see discussion in Featherstone, 1998,
2000). There is clearly an encyclopaedic imagination at work here.

11. Umberto Eco has also discussed the encyclopaedic novel in *The Aesthetics of Chaosmos*.

Encyclopaedic novels such as James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* and Thomas Mann’s *Dr Faustus* can be
seen as adopting a medieval model of reproducing the rules of cosmic order which first entails the
cataloguing of the objects in the world. Joyce and Mann both used extensive ‘encyclopaedic’ citations and
incorporated unacknowledged excerpts into their work.

12. In addition to conventional encyclopaedias of the social sciences, social theory, humanities etc., there
has been a wide range of specialist topics such as *Encyclopaedia of Terrorism, Encyclopaedia of the
Homeless, Encyclopaedia of Social Measurement*, *Encyclopaedia of Women and Gender*.

13. Described in a review in *Contemporary Psychology* as ‘the largest corpus of knowledge about the
social and behavioral sciences in existence . . . the social science equivalent of the Egyptian pyramids
. . . one of the great wonders of the scientific world . . . the web-based version of the Encyclopedia
fully unleashes the power, complexity, and organization of this monumental work’ (cited on the
Elsevier website).

14. This is evident in one of the earliest attempts, H.G. Wells’ ‘World Brain’, in the 1930s, which argues
for an integrated world education. Wells envisaged a ‘Permanent World Encyclopaedia’ which would
be a new world organ for the collection, indexing, summarizing and release of knowledge linking
together all libraries and archives. In addition, it was intended as a ‘planetary memory for mankind’,
containing a visual record of human knowledge, ideas and achievements. It would be useful for
professionals in universities, but also for schools, colleges and ordinary people at home. This would
lead to common understanding, the intellectual unification of humanity and ultimately world peace
(Wells, 1938). The hierarchy of authoritative knowledge and its centredness on western canons are
not put into question. Little thought is given to the medium and questions of translation.

15. The New Encyclopaedia Project has been under way since 2001 and colloquia have been held at:
Hitotsubashi University in June 2001; Cambridge University in July 2001, Nottingham Trent
University in August 2002 and August 2003; Kobe University in October 2002; Tokyo University,
Yonsei University, Korea University, Seoul National and Kyoto Bukkyo University in October 2003;
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