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'Safe spaces' – Electronic media, the internet, and the representation of disability

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Abstract: This paper details the findings from a research into educational 'safe spaces'. In this research, the electronic media emplaced within four English schools' intranet sites were examined to evidence the image of disability and impairment constructed in this 'safe space'. The research, through the employment of proto text analysis, revealed that the image of disability and impairment within schools' electronic media represented and unbalanced and negative image of disability that was grounded in the ideology of child deficit. Based upon these findings it is argued that 'safe space' in relation to these intranet sites was more a metaphor of dominance and power than one located within the principles of equality and social justice. The paper argues that as educators we must move beyond safe spaces as a shallow paradigm of meaning and ask when creating such places - what does space mean, how do the electronic media employed in such spaces create meaning and what might specific safe spaces do?

Key Words: Disability, Internet, Intranet, Social Justice, Representations

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to bring critical attention to the manner in which electronic media, the internet and intranet are employed as pedagogical space in schools. In this paper I seek to 'subvert the structural position of disability as marker' (Kuppers 2003, 4) within such electronic sites and in its emplaced media. I reveal how the representation of illness and disability within schools' intranet sites serve to 'contain the Other, [they] isolate it, present it outside 'normal' society and bodies ...'. In this paper the electronic environ is re-drawn as an ontological envelope. This envelope, I argue, enfolds, constricts and constrains individualisation through 'impoverished representations' (Latour, 2011, 44) sealing such 'smoothed' out images within totalising structures of modern power and ableist agendas (Agamben, 1998). Here, then, I 're-think' schools intranet sites recasting them as 'covert forms of manipulation' where pronominal games and illocutionary mirrors reflect an imposed lexis and unresolved dialectic between constituting and constituted power (Pinto, 2004). This research's examination of schools' intranet sites reveals imposed binary dialectics and unearths 'the conditions of exclusion experienced by people with impairments' (Godley, 2007).

During a visit to a local school, a teacher commented that they liked the school's internet and intranet as it provided a 'safe space' in which pupils could learn¹. As researcher, I entered this space with my vision shrouded by a cloak stitched through with utopian ideal. This ideal centred on the belief that in this 'brave new world' disability, social justice and equality might harmoniously co-exist within the electronic media and digital landscape presented to children. Here though was error as this ideal became but epigraph to my naivety of this electronic topography and the media contained there within. Through immersing myself in the cultures and practices of the world wide web and schools' intranet sites an educational space was revealed that was but mirror to the reflected images of societies' bigotries and 'ablest' agendas (see Hodkinson 2012a). This mirror then was 'not [a]... mask of reality' but reflected only the 'reality of past ages' (Cover 1983: 65) Exploration of this topos, in Cover's (1983) terms, did not reflect a separation between life and knowledge, it produced no homological inversions only inversions of inversions (Latour, 2010). My utopian ideal inverted, my journey became constrained and conformed by a Cartesian logic. It was this logic which brought me crashing back to this earth and its old world geographies as I began my analysis of educational safe spaces.

¹ Putting to one side the moral panic which renders the information super highway as a topos inhabited by predatory paedophiles, one awash with pornography, every fetish known to society, and that safe space is an overused but under theorised metaphor (Hodkinson, In Press).

1.1. Safe Spaces

'We are not going to enter Srebrenica, we just want to pacify Srebrenica.' Radovan Karadzic (1993) in response to United Nations making Srebrenica a safe haven.

'The American mission in Afghanistan...is to prevent terrorists from using its territory as a safe haven.' David Cameron (2006)

Mr. Blair did not believe Cabinet was a "safe space" in which to debate issues involved in going to war.' Sir Gus O'Donnell – 26th January 2011 – Iraq Inquiry.

'Space means greater well-being for our children and adventure, an outlet for all the things we thought there wasn't any outlet for.' Margret Mead (1960)

If we type the term 'safe/space,' and its equivalents, into an internet search engine we find some 14,600,000 results as to its meaning; such as those detailed above. In examining these quotes I found myself asking: what do we actually mean by space and what makes it safe, indeed safe from what and from whom?

Within education the commonplace and uncritical acceptance of safety as a bedrock of quality education, is to me both curious as it is dangerous (Boostron, 1998). Indeed, Boostroom (1998:405) relates 'Teachers who create 'safe spaces' care about their students and because they do they eliminate pain from education'. Boostrom (1998, 496) continues that the power of safe space metaphor is to censor critical thinking. Barret (2010) also believes that safe space is an overused but under theorised metaphor. Others though have written of safe spaces in educational environments as an accepted part of the professional vernacular (Boostrom, 1998). For example, Lempert et. al. (2012: 45) relates that safe spaces are 'central to meaningful expression of missing discourses' and to 'reclaiming lost narratives'. It would appear that in safe spaces in education, as elsewhere, that 'being in a place where [people] are accepted for who they were without question' is important (Bryant et al. 2011:618). In addition, we are informed in the literature base that safe spaces 'provide safety from danger' which 'allows people to manage their own risk (Hunter, 2008:19). Like Barrett (2010) though I to question the notion of these spaces as places of safety, especially as they relate to the internet and its associated electronic media. I am not minded to accept such claims so easily. My question is; why is there need for such spaces and does their existence reveal only danger by providing a container for ethereal perceptions of safety rather than actual safety itself? In line with Yamashita (2004) I believe as educators we should think again about such safe spaces. This research then critically analyses this 'new world' of the internet and its electronic pedagogical materials by seeking to locate the picture of disability and disabled people that teachers have chosen to colonise this 'safe space' for learning.

1.2. The Internet

Recent Internet statistics reveal 2,267,233,742² users worldwide. For many, 'large chunks of our time' (Margetts, 2009: 31) are spent gazing at the 'depthless surface' of the computer monitor as window to our exploration of the topology of cyberspace (Borgman, 2010). This 'public sphere' (Habermas, 1989) and new 'celebrated social space' (Chon, nd: 149) has invaded and transformed western cultural space in its entirety creating new geopolitical boundaries (Borgman, 2010). Cyberspace is, in Platonic terms, an everlasting space of emplacement, a created techno-utopian ideal (Margetts, 2009) where a seemingly 'gilt-edged revolution of informatilisation' (Yanarella *et. al.*, 2000: 48) obfuscated by a 'glamorous fog' (Borgman, 2010) is disturbing and encroaching on traditional modalities of information exchange located in our schools (Hodkinson, 2012a).

The Internet itself evolved in 1983 (Naughton, 2003) from a 'quiet metamorphosis' (Pickard, 2008: 427) of a military communication project funded by the United States Department of Defence. Although the Internet is perceived as a computer network (Naughton 2003), in reality no single monolithic structure prevails. Rather a matrix of 'eco systems of sub-cultures' (Rheingold, 2000: xviii) enmesh to form global computer to computer networks operating using such languages as the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP/IP) (Naughton, 2003). Born out of the belly of cold war nuclear threat (Yanarella *et. al.*, 2000) this earliest 'virtual village,' of a few hundred people, has transmuted itself to a state where, within western society, it dominates many spheres of daily life (Rheingold, 2000: xvi). Cyberspace, then, with its 'highways of the mind' (Al Gore 1991 in Rheingold, 2000: xvii) is credited with the potentiality to revolutionise participatory democracy and contribute to various sociological phenomenon, not least education, that in due course will positively transmute the public sphere (Thornton, 2002).

There can be no doubt then that the Internet and its technologies represents a 'radical transformation' of the communication environment' (Naughton, 2003: 491) both at societal level generally and specifically within educational environments. For, 'cyber optimists' and many Western policymakers the Internet has taken on a mythical power which is bound up in a quasi-religious belief of positivity. Within cyberspace, then, it appears, almost 'supernatural things' (Morozov, 2011: 10) are possible as the Internet becomes the panacea, the techno-fix, for all of societal ills (Rheingold, 2000).

I want now to examine the development of pedagogical materials that have been formulated to support teaching and learning within this new digital world. To begin this analysis though, we need to briefly examine the development of the earliest materials, those that took the written form.

² See <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

2. The development of pedagogical support materials

2.1. First wave technologies

Since the 'advent of typography and the rise in mass schooling' (Luke et. al. 1989, p.45) the printed textbook had held dominance within classrooms. Indeed, Podeh (2005, p.2) suggests the employment of the textbook became a ritual where the authority of print was placed beyond criticism in the praxis of the information exchange. Textbooks it is argued are based upon 'specialised forms' of institutionalised school knowledge (Dowling 1996, p. 49). For example, (Taxel 1989, p. 33) contends that textbooks employ specialised knowledge 'dominated by the world view and the ideological perspectives of those occupying positions of socio-economic pre-eminence in society'. Crawford et. al (2008) argues, that textbooks are social constructions employing a 'selective tradition' (Williams 1961, p.50) to inculcate pupils into the cultural and socio-economic order of society. In recent years though, the dominance of the textbook within schools has been eroded by the advent of new electronic media.

2.2. Second and third wave technologies

At the most basic level electronic media relate to any medium which conveys a message or represents a communicative act based upon a technological component (Morley & Robbins, 1995). Subsequent to the emergence of second wave technologies, those of radio and television, a new digital culture was formed by the development of third wave technologies such as computers, internet, multimedia and hypertexts (Beavis,1998). This electronic media has penetrated the traditional geopolitical boundaries of society and presently is disturbing and encroaching on traditional school modalities of information exchange (Kress, 1997). Whilst many observe these digital technologies as positive, others believe they should be treated with caution (Beavis 1998). For example, Reid (2003), although believing these technologies reduce the influence of governments and schools to shape children's minds and attitudes, contends they are sites where the information exchange creates dominant cultural pedagogies. Luke (1996, p.1) asserts that these digital cultures teach pupils: 'how to become consumers and how to become boys and girls, lessons about skills and values and gender and social power'. It seems possible then that electronic media, like textbooks before, rather than being a safe space for learning might actually inculcate children into the dominant hegemony of society.

I want now to explore an occurrence of safe space in education. A space upon whose claim to safety was predicated upon the logic that it was teachers who controlled the media that dominated the electronic landscape in which children were free to roam. Through such exemplification I wish to reveal how all spaces, no matter how they are named have inherent dangers folded within and without their existence. Following this I will provide the nucleus of my argument against safe spaces in education through five provocations. Here, I will contend that many safe spaces are

neither safe nor are they emplaced with safety but in reality reflect something perhaps altogether more sinister.

3. Research Questions

A review of the literature identified a number of questions which merited further investigation. These being;

- does electronic media reflect the diversity inherent within our society; and,
- what is the pre-dominant model of disability detailed within the electronic media commonly presented to primary school children?
- Are schools' intranet sites safe spaces for equality and social justice?

4. Methodology

The research examined the representation and treatment of disability, impairment and disabled people within the electronic media employed within primary schools in England. The data collection was located within four randomly chosen state primary schools in the North-West of England. The research analysed all the materials these schools had chosen to save upon their internal computer servers. Although the sample of schools was in itself limited there was a wealth of data collected. In total then 494 separate electronic resources were analysed which included 4,485 illustrations, 930 photographs and 59 video clips.

The methodology employed proto-text analysis (Bourdillion, 1992) within which content, textual and discourse analysis were simultaneously employed to uncover the explicit and implicit message conveyed within the sample media (Johnsen, 1993). In uncovering the electronic media's subcutaneous (Johnsen, 1993) layer the overall aim of the research was to examine whether consciously or unconsciously they promoted prejudices or stereotypical ideas about disability or disabled people (Fritzsche, 1992).

Phase one of the research, the macro analysis, involved each electronic media being examined section by section, with sections which referenced disability or disabled people or disability issues being demarcated (Commeyras & Alverman, 1996; Ninnes, 2002). Within phase two, the microanalysis, the demarcated sections were examined using linguistic analysis (Crawford, 2004). Here linguistic forms within the text such as the lexicon, agency and action, voice, verbs and adjectives (Ninnes, 2002) were analysed to reveal any 'hidden assumptions' about disability and disabled people (Crawford 2004, p. 21). Particular attention was given during this analysis to positionality of intellectual disabilities within the text. During this phase, a frequency and space analysis were also conducted; simple counting and calculating of the discrete sections examined how frequently disability, disabled people or impairments were mentioned. Finally, an examination of the images within the

electronic media was undertaken. This involved a simple tallying of the people, categorised by race, disability, impairment and gender (Johnsen, 1993).

5. Results

The study's dataset was wide-ranging and included every area of the curriculum as well as material which dealt with the wider life of the schools participating in the research. The electronic media contained electronic textbooks, smartboard resources, computer games, teacher constructed and commercial worksheets, internet websites, teacher initiated photographs and video clips. Despite the depth of the data collected a significant finding was the lack of material which related to disability and impairment. For example, only one electronic textbook referred to disability directly, and even this was contextualised with just 28 words, another electronic storybook indirectly, in just 46 words, referred to a character that had a physical disability. Whilst this lack of data was illuminating it was of concern that a 'positive narrative' of disability was not evident within the sample media. At a more pragmatic level this lack of data also constricted the range and scope of the linguistic analysis.

5.1. Linguistic analysis and discussion

Despite the rather limited sample size it is of interest to note the contents of the two pieces of electronic media in which disability was present. In the first, an electronic storybook, disability as metaphor was constructed through the image of a pirate (a not uncommon image in the dataset). The character concerned was employed to represent the 'baddy' in the narrative. The pirate in this pictorial form was a diminutive figure, rather overweight and with ruddy cheeks he did not look in the best of health. Indeed, he looked as though a heart attack was imminent. He had a lower limb amputation, a prosthetic limb made out of wood, a visual impairment necessitating an eye patch and a 'scruffy black beard'. The character was described as,

'Of course like most pirates [he] had a wooden peg for a leg so every now and then he would wobble and hobble as he walked...'

'All in all [he] didn't seem like a very fearsome pirate at all.'

Here, then, disability was constructed through a person supposed to be 'sinister and evil,' however, this pirate could not even get this characterisation right. Instead, he was located within the text more as a 'pitiable and pathetic' person, an 'object of ridicule'. This representation of disability correlates strongly with Biklen and Bogdana (1977) analysis of the general media's categorisation of disability. To move the disability/pirate metaphor further, although not along a plank as we shall observe later as this is misrepresentation of pirate culture, another of Biklen and Bogdana's categorisation is aptly represented in Stevenson's classic portrayal of the pirate in *Treasure Island*. Here, Stevenson portrays Long John Silver as being courageous

despite his impairments. It seems the image of ‘supercrip’ is never very far away. Interestingly though, like disability, pirates too have had a ‘bad press’ (Kuhn, 2010). Note for example this early piece of misrepresentation, ‘being possessed of a devil’s fury, ripped open one of the prisoners with his cutlass, tore the living heart out of his body, gnawed at it, and then hurled it in the face of one of the others’.-Alexander Exquemelin in *The Buccaneers of America 1678* (Kuhn, 2010). Upon reading this quote one feels you should shout, in a west country accent, ‘shiver me timbers’ and ‘ah Jim Lad’ but this would be false as this is the language of disneyfication not of piracy. Disability during this period was no more common amongst pirates than the general population and interestingly it was pirates who set up some of the first charities for disabilities (Kuhn, 2010). This picture would seem to stand at some distance from the image of pirates constructed by today’s society.

5.2. Analysis of the images

Figure 1 Analysis of the illustrations

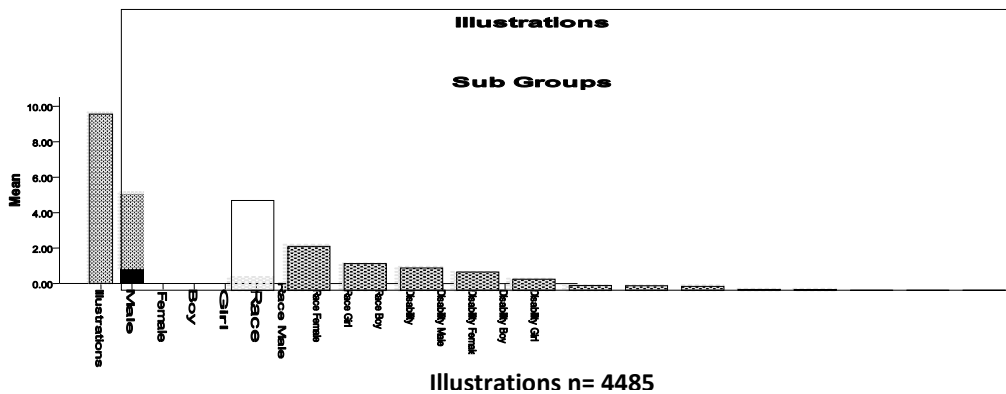


Figure 2 photographs

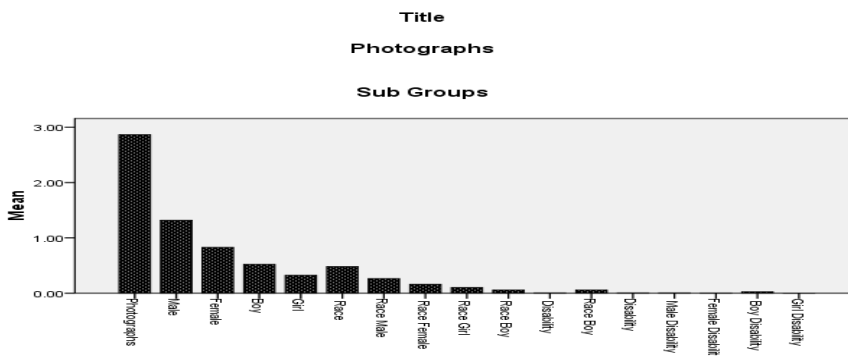


Table 1 Analysis of the images of disability

Photographs n= 930

Table 2 – Analysis of the photographs

Results for Gender			Result for Race			Results for Disability		
	Totals	%		Totals	%		Totals	%
Total	930		Total	184	19.8	Total	17	1.8
Total Male	571	61	Total Male	114	12.3	Total Male	14	1.5
Adult Male	345	37	Adult Male	89	9.6	Adult Male	3	0.3
Boy	226	24	Boy	25	2.7	Boy	11	1.2
Total Female	359	39	Total Female	70	7.5	Total Female	3	0.3
Adult Female	219	24	Adult Female	25	2.7	Adult Female	2	0.2
Girl	140	15	Girl	45	4.8	Girl	1	0.1

Figure 3 – Analysis of the video

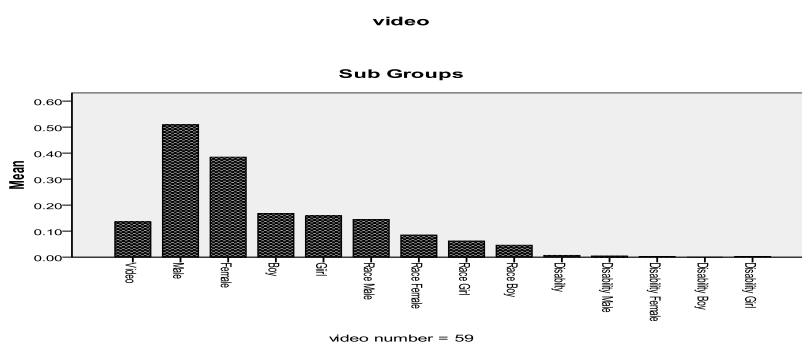


Table 3- Analysis of the image of disability contained in the electronic media.

Form of impairment	Total n= 34 %	Notes on perceived positive image:
Mild visual impairment requiring glasses	44.1	
Wheelchair users aided	17.7	
Wheelchair user unaided	8.8	Girl playing a trumpet and also one girl wheelchair user introducing video clips. 1 adult female wheelchair user lighting the flame for para-olympic games
Lower limb loss	7.7	
Pirate image	11.7	

The images encountered within the sample media are noteworthy in several respects (see figures 1-3 and tables 1-3). In terms of gender the analysis indicates a substantial gender bias in the illustrations, photographs and videos. Of note is that within the illustrations only 27% represented children and within the photographs it was 39% and again a male bias was evident. In terms of an analysis of race 13.5% of the illustrations and 19.8% of the images in the photographs represented people from a minority ethnic community. Furthermore, within the data for race a gender bias was again evident. A major finding of the research though is the virtual absence of an image of disabled people within the electronic media commonly presented to primary school children. The findings of the study highlight that the most prevalent image the school children are introduced to is that of the white, non-disabled adult male.

5.3. The image of disability portrayed within the electronic media

Although the image of disability portrayed within the electronic media was extremely limited an analysis of the 34 images discovered provided distinctive data (see table 3). For example, the most commonly portrayed picture was that of physical disability indeed no pictures of obvious intellectual disabilities were observable. Of the 34 images subject to analysis 44% portrayed people with a mild visual impairment corrected by glasses, 26.5 % of the images related to wheelchair users of which only 8.8% were independent, 7.7% showed people with a lower limb amputation and 11.7% located disability within the image of a pirate. Of further interest was that only 8.8% of the images located disability within the image of a child. This represents less

than 0.05% of the total images analysed. Of concern was that only two images (see table 3) could be perceived to represent positive images of disability. A major finding from the study, confirming that of Hodkinson (2007), is that in the wealth of school orientated images that were analysed such as playgrounds, classrooms, swimming lessons and school sports days no picture of disability was observable.

6. Discussion

Based upon the findings detailed above the argument I develop is that the internet and these schools' intranet sites are but a mirror to a past society. This mirror 'imposes the discipline of institutional justice upon norms and place' (Cover, 1983). In this 'glassy essence' the metaphysics of transparency form a unifying dialectic between internet present and society's past reality. This mirror inverts the inversion. It reflects into this space only a separation between ontology and narrative. Bigoted stereotypical images and ideals in the extant text based world are reflected and transposed onto this electronic topography. In this world, then, there is no unbridgeable gulf between reflection and that which is reflected. There is no irreducible opposition here. Participation in this world is coeval to obligation/coercion/equality. In the creation of this space of shadows a double bind of 'fiery illusion' and 'icy reason' (Latour, 2010) were folded in on themselves. Explicit became implicit contradiction (Latour, 2010) as inequalities of past society acted as hinge to this new world. As such this 'safe space' became an educational playground where coercion/participation morphed to produce a state of being that effectively acted as a method of societal control – this space becomes jurispathic (Cover 1983). In this place the subject believes they are free but as Latour (2010) relates in reality they are wholly controlled. The mirror becomes a transparent reflection of the cold computer screen- it is antithetical inverting focus onto a topography of bigoted stereotypical inversions, 'where conditions of knowledge are independent of what empirically exists' (Cover 1983, 289).

Let's though try to be positive - the Internet, intranet and electronic media are determined by the ingenuity of its users (Naughton, 2003) and the internet's open transfer protocols do promote rapid communication on a global scale. Indeed, this new space is also one where traditional publishing "road blocks;" such as cost (Margetts, 2002), short text shelf life (Naughton, 2003) can be overcome by employing internetting technology. Thus, the potentiality **is** there to enable the voices of marginalised populations to be heard. However, this potentiality only further illuminates the perverted reflections of the mirror. It is in the pedagogy of the voice (Reid, 2000) where a colonising demand and its control of narrative materialises within this digital space³. Whilst the internet enunciates in democratising voices and supposedly promotes a space to hear voices of democracy, its landscape

³ See Hodkinson(2012a)

'completely ignores the social conditions of vast groups of people' (Chon, n.d). For many, the reality of this space of info flows is one which increasingly reflects the hegemony of the space of places (Yanarella, 2000). For Margetts (2009:6) the Internet is not a new democratic arena but a place where 'social problems reinvent themselves... in a new space of inequality'. For example, Thornton (2002:17) details that men 'have been a dominant presence on the Internet' and that the internet from its conception was male territory. Reid (2000) concurs adding that the prevailing hierarchy of this internet community also places race, class and age as subaltern to societal conceptions of normalcy. According to Lessig's framework (see Best & Wade, 2006:13) social norms regulate the internet space through community transferred stigma. Hall (1999:45) in an extraordinary astute and early analysis of the internet describes such technology as an "irrepresentational machine" where monolingualism and homogeneity dominate. He comments,

'... Rather than transcending barriers, then, the Internet culture seems to reinforce them accentuating the themes of modernism rather than replacing them and reducing heterogeneity... the Internet seems to be promoting lifestyle enclaves ... seen in this light [this] ... media age begins much more like earlier civilisations.' (Hall, 1999: 46)

Here, then, I support the argument of Habermas (2006: 419) which relates that 'mass communication is yet another source of power where players on the virtual stage take control by employment of the capita they possess'. Here, in this internet space and through its emplaced electronic media we may observe Foucault's analytics of modern power and that One never really stands outside power dynamics (See Hodkinson, 2012b). In this Internet and its associated media therefore we may observe that individualisation, equality and social justice are forced to compete/participate within totalising structures of modern power (Agamben, 1998, p. 5). Here in Agamben's (1998, p. 17) terms there is to be no state of exception- no exemption from extant power. There is to be only the mirrored gaze of a past society. A reflected image of totalizing power that corrupts totally⁴. Information within the internet, intranet and its media, as with all previous technologies, 'does not flow in a vacuum, but in a political space that is already occupied' (Morozov, 2011:23). In this participation/ obligation/ coercion game a 'constellation of power relations' shrouds who decides 'what the game is, and what it is about and also who decides who gets in the game' (Ainsworth et al. 2005: 127/129). Participation in this topos then is double-edged. You are forced to participate in a game of unequal teams. This digital landscape then demonstrates how the Internet and its emplaced electronic media becomes just a new iteration of established practices (Morozov, 2011).

⁴ Here then I argue that Agamben state of exception is suspended by this state in order to create a utopian upside/ down, right way up state where the mirror reflects a separation between ontology and narrative.

6.1. Are safe spaces places of safety?

My journey into this digital educational world was marked then by the virtual absence of an image of disability. I only found an ableist essence in the electronic media and pictures discovered within the school's intranet sites. Indeed my wanderings in this digital topography highlighted a pedagogical space where the most prevalent image encountered was that of the white, non-disabled adult male. Here then safe space materialised an agenda of ableism and normalcy. Disability was a limited, controlled and conformed indigene. The limited construct of disability observed here pulled focus on the cultural dominance of non-disabled people within this society. It promulgated a knowledge, void of concepts, revealing an understanding of 'priori conditions of knowledge, independent of what empirically [existed]' (Gasche, 1986, 26). Potentially, though, this knowledge had very real effects by defining societal conceptions of impairment. It was an intercourse between 'imaginary beings and imaginary natural science'... and with the aid of the signs it became imagined teleology revealing only 'nervus sympathicus' not a topography of safety (Nietzsche, 1895: 15).

Let me now provide my argument against safe spaces. This argument is contained, but not constrained, within five provocations. These contentions are not mutually exclusive but have porous and flexible boundaries.

Provocation One – Space is 'potentially powerful in transforming the way we understand exclusion and inclusion... space reveals geographies of power' (Armstrong, 2010, 95)

Provocation Two – Educators have always cultivated spaces (Kovacs & Frost, 2012). Schools have always represented an array of characteristic arrangement of 'spaces, techniques and occasions for the transformation of populations'. These spaces are not emancipatory but maintain 'discipline through the machinery of cultural regulation' which 'is entwined with a regime of care' and in the pedagogical materials they employ to support teaching. Schools, then, have always been 'instruments of power' (Peim, 2001: 179/185). Power here, despite the rhetoric, is wielded by the teachers not the pupils.

Provocation Three – It is educators who divide and populate the space in which the children are contained. This is the straight jacketed space that contains and constrains children's capacity for 'self motivation, self direction, self instruction and general self management' (Peim, 2001: 184). There is nothing new in safe spaces as there is no real safety in terms of emancipatory possibilities.

Provocation Four- Safe spaces are in reality 'warped space'. Here landscapes of fear and 'topographies of despair' have been created which mimic 'modern technological and capitalist development' (Vidler (2001: ii). These spaces are not utopias but only heterotopias. They are spaces for the containment of degrees of deviances from the norm. In these spaces 'the rules of the game', 'negotiations and

performances of power and influence in relationships' are the complex mechanism to keep pupils locked in (Temple, 2007: 872).

My analysis of safe reveals, in Foucauldian terms, how spatial techniques enforce power. Safe spaces are enclosures which allow for flexible and detailed control. In these spaces freedom is foreclosed by the Big Other (Zizek, 2009) through such things as electronic media. In such spaces, places that seem like an entrance reveal only an exclusion and obstruction. (Linville, 2009) They are a pharmakon; a remedy that provides the destruction (Casey, 1998) and perhaps are nothing more than a Harpoldian detour¹.

Provocation Five – Safe spaces act as a mask to the bigotry replete in society. These spaces then are the blank spaces of the state where the excluded are perceived as threat to community. Here, in these 'private' spaces those who dwell are 'excluded at a proper distance' (Zizek, 2009). Equality here in the dialectical sense is formed through limitation contained within 'a mere neutral container of some content that eludes this form' (Zizek, 2009 173). Zizek (2009, 371) analysis of power transfers easily to the concept of safe spaces. He contends,

'dispositif of Power which structures and sustains the very space within which they operate? Today, the movement for gay rights, human rights, and so on, all rely on state apparatuses, which are not only the addressee of their demands, but also provide the framework of their activity'.

One can never be totally free or totally safe when the borders of the space in which you exist are maintained by state (read also school) apparatus and materials. The freedom here, indeed the safety here is as in Foucault's leper, safety for the state and the 'normal community' from those who dare to deviate. Perhaps safe spaces are then more for teachers than they are for the pupils.

For myself, tracing the *modus vivendi* of this concept through the medium of electronic media renders it as just another one of those educational bullshit phrases that says everything but says nothing. My argument is that in this educational form, as elsewhere, safe space's operation was revealed as Latour's black box – a well-established and unproblematic object (Latour, 2003). Here perceived virtues of shelters of equality are 'so simple so deeply rooted' (Bachelard, 1994) but the reality is, these shelters of safety are built with 'walls of impalpable shadows' stabilised on the bedrock of educational rhetoric and stereotypical pedagogical support materials. Thus, safe spaces provide nothing but 'illusions of protection' (Bachelard, 1994:5). I want educators to move beyond this uncritical acceptance of safe space. My axiom here is layered upon Foucault's (1977) notion that space is an important category of analysis because it brings into purview vistas in which vacillations and ideological representations present space bounded by constitutions of power and knowledge (See Pavlov-West, 2009).

It is through the semiosis of the social text of safe spaces enunciated in the schools' intranet sites that One may actually observe such vacillations. I argue therefore that

rather than being emancipatory spaces such educational topographies are in reality manifestations of extant ghettos – heterotopias of deviation- controlled geometries of subservience bounded by limiting frontiers and policed by sometimes well-meaning but bigoted border guards. These are spaces of domination in which ‘surveillance becomes the privileged form of action’ (Casey, 1998, 184) where each ‘individual is fixed in his place’ (Foucault, 1977 – see Casey 1998, 184). They are spaces where ‘fencing in and naming of go hand and hand’ (Pavlov- West, 2009, 196). This binary tension between essence and appearance of being, of nothingness – of here and of nowhere renders many of these places as neither safe, nor spaces of equality and social justice (Pavlov-West, 2009). Rather these blocs of becoming (Colebrook, 2005) conjure a topography of recreated striated Euclidean space of Foucault’s leper. Here, then, the ‘space of identity (of entity) is a function of difference (Pavlov-West, 2009, 176). Exceptionalism located here is not the product principally of self-determining minority ‘separating an infantilizing celebration of ethic self-determining. Rather, it is a product primarily of ‘initial ignoring and rendering invisible of people’s designation’ (Golberg, 2000, 74). As such safe spaces cannot be perceived as a Baroque fold (Deleuze, 2006) which asks society to consider sameness and difference as fluid relationships, upon a continuum of uniqueness (Pavlov-West, 2009). Rather they unfold a hypertext of the empty fortress (Bettelheim, 1967) a menstrual hut, a movie theatre “balcony for people of colour” where “decent” society is purged of deviant intent and action (See Pavlov-West, 2009). This notion of purging is important as Kristeva claims – the disgust at fluids is an adult reaction to vacillations – the gagging reaction which accompanies disgust – the movement of expulsion. (See Pavlov-West 2009). Thus safe spaces become the empty fortress – a ring of walls encircling a central absence. The self that constructs this space is folded into an act of expulsion where the self is marked from the very beginning by loss and from where the subject emerges ‘not as an individual but as the Other’ (Pavlov-West, 2009, 223).

7. Conclusions

Safe space then is a metaphor of dominance and power. It is a symbol of societal purging, where individuals of difference in their response to external danger respond with inner manoeuvres that actually debilitate them further (Zizek, 2009). We must move beyond safe spaces as a shallow paradigm of meaning and ask when creating such places - what does space mean, how do the electronic media employed in such spaces create meaning and what might specific safe spaces do? Only by asking such questions can we provide the ‘fertile conditions’ and ‘exquisitely dynamic intensity’ situation which enables us to see what the outside ‘folds into our identity’ and ‘how we can never control the forces of the outside’ (Butler, 1995, p. 131). Only by entertaining such thought structures can we ever hope to be ‘available to a transformation of who we are, a contestation which compels us to rethink ourselves, a reconfiguration of our ‘place’ and our ‘ground’ ” (Butler, 1995, p. 131) and of the

pedagogical materials employed to support teaching and learning in our schools in the 21st Century.

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