

The Luddite

“I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots.” **Albert Einstein**

“Breaking the Fourth Wall” is our 2018 PNLA Conference theme. I suppose, satire is nothing if not metatheatrical... marionetteish, yanking the strings of the puppets, objects of our satire, out from their world beyond the proscenium arch. Their folly, subject of the satire, is extruded from one sheltered stage to the unfettered public’s eye, cleanly surgical at best. At its worst, it could look a little like the last scene of Hamlet! Frighteningly, when I think of the fourth wall, I am catapulted to the futuristic world where books are burned. In Ray Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451 I read the following:

“It’s really fun. It’ll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed. How long can you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a fourth wall-TV put in? It’s only two thousand dollars.”

“That’s one-third of my yearly pay.”

“It’s only two thousand dollars,” she replied. “And I should think you’d consider me sometimes. If we had a fourth wall, why it’d be just like this room wasn’t ours at all, but all kinds of exotic people’s room. We could do without a few things.”

“We’re already doing without a few things to pay for the third wall. It was put in only two months ago, remember?”

“Is that all it was?” She sat looking for him for a long moment. “Well, goodbye dear” (pp. 20-21).

While my colleagues may see our new technologies as facilitating the breaking out of the confines of our physical library spaces, the cages of the zoo have always been open. We have always had the

The Technophile

Breaking the Fourth Wall

When we agree to allow technology into our lives we allow one (often very small) wall to contain us, to absorb us and convince us to devote time, energy and resources to its survival, its upgrades, its “connections”, and not our own. By devoting time to screens we have become more sedentary, less focused, and more near sighted. New technologies and applications rush in to fix each symptom as they appear: apps to track movement for physical fitness, computer games to increase focus, or glasses to reduce eye fatigue. These are solutions to problems that we created.

Why do we subject ourselves to these conditions? We do not just carry a wall— we carry a tiny super computer that allows us to skip back and forth over the proscenium, dancing in and out of the roles of actor, director, author, audience, critic, and archivist. Better yet, we have the ability to carry these relatively inexpensive devices with us wherever we go. We have taken the production out of the theater (or classroom, office, study, or library) and out onto the grand stage.

This allows us to bring fantastical technologies wherever we please. While our grandparents had to sit for hours to take a photograph, our children record high definition video of each other goofing around at the press of a button. Finish a book while on vacation? Download another before breakfast. See something beautiful? Photograph it and share the joy of sunlight catching the snow to create a thousand little points of brilliance.

The portability of digital information, storage, and connection has become an asset that allows regular people to get outside and engage differently with each other. Yes, we have given something up

ability to play the Pied Piper of Hamelin and escort out patrons to the light of day through our glass ceilings. We have always possessed walking shoes to expand our terrain to include our neighboring libraries, social agencies, service clubs, to any individual or group that would listen to our embracing proselytizing. In fact, every corner in all our communities are the Speakers' Corner of Hyde Park! I sit in my old wooden chair, thumbing the tabs on my well-worn alphabetizing Sort-All, what YOU might euphemistically call an "idiot board." Buff subject catalog cards sit in little piles, and I wonder about the masochism here in this satire.

I will admit that the Smartphone, drones, Google Earth, Bluetooth technologies, GoToMeeting, and all things virtual are ready and handy sledge hammers to break that fourth wall down, yet I humbly point out that this transgression of planes is more a matter of outreach attitude than it is of electronic gadgetry. The only thing stopping our programming's outrageousness or casting further our grant writing net is the ambition that comes with dreaming big.

Guy and Mildred Montag of Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*? Mildred's our antithesis; she desperately seeks the fourth wall of mind-numbing surround-television. Theirs is the world of Mechanical Hounds, rampaging, roving, controlling technology beyond the scope even of the ever resourceful East Germans and their Stasi, masters of *Zersetzung*, the consuming psychological assault on enemies, translating as *decomposition*. For the Luddite Librarian, technology is like all things, existing in both yin and yang. I truly believe this duality of nature, but it is my zealotry NOT to be controlled by technology. The classic dystopian novels are my dark scriptures, filling me with trepidation of things that have leapt beyond the mechanical and analog.

by being able to answer work emails at 10 PM on a Thursday, but we have gained access to relatives across the globe, their faces beamed into our devices, their words transported to us in seconds. We can check a topographic map at a trail intersection deep in the woods, tune a guitar on the go, and look up facts about architecture in a strange city—all without detaching from our companions to visit a professional for assistance.

The interactive web, or Internet 2.0, is breaking down the fourth wall as it allows viewers to participate, creators to talk directly to the audience, people to engage with and write stories as they go. This has been a trend since live video began streaming into living rooms, since radio broadcast live voices, since letters crossed great distances to connect friends. To be a Luddite is to be afraid of the technology; to be human is to understand the potential of connection.

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The Luddite, Cont.

When I walk around home at night, it is not dark because the oven and coffee maker are lighthouses of LED illumination. This is unnecessary technology. Until it was totaled at an intersection, my last car had crank windows, and it was a relatively new Edsel! Why are electric windows so indispensable? If you wish to demolish that fourth wall, consider the Luddite way!

If you are an employer or supervisor, the Smartphone is a chink in the wall, at least. You want your workers to be productive, to be focused on the mission of your organization. But, that device may be the distraction that dooms your profit margin. With each text thumbed and sent and each cute puppy video viewed and reflected upon, your place of employment loses precious time not being spent on work, but nonetheless, time for which that worker is being paid. While that worker may still be in the cubicle or in the warehouse, they have broken down the shop walls and are free to roam planet Earth freely. The cosmos and chaos are theirs!

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