

Unit Eight Paper

*What navigational "style" (or "styles"), as explored in Media Unlimited have you found most effective for "navigating" the media and advancing your learning--and why?*

I found all the navigational styles in *Media Unlimited* to be incomplete. They seem to focus mainly on entertainment, such as, television, music, movies and other aspects of the entertainment industry with only some mention of advertising and only then in its' support of consumerism. There is plenty of learning that occurs outside of this industry and I did not find any of the styles to be useful for managing the media torrent from the Internet for example. Gitlin seems to be blinded by his dislike of modern media and its' impact on society. Honestly, at one point in the middle of the book with all the 'gnashing of teeth' about the media torrent, even back to the ancient Greeks, I had the thought that maybe Gitlin didn't even want the written word to exist because it might somehow negatively impact us if it were to be thrust upon us in an unwelcome manner, such as, on a billboard on the side of road. It almost seemed like Gitlin would prefer that we all exist in some cocoon like state without any external stimulus imposing itself upon us.

While I find fault with Gitlin's negative view of modern life his navigational styles do cover the different ways that people use to work through way the flow of information from the entertainment industry. For example, I am a Fan. Shows such as Top Gear on BBC America or Dexter on Showtime or certain sports teams, West Ham United in the English Premier League are examples of when I am a Fan. While this is a style that I use, it is probably one I use the least amount of the time. When I think of all the time I spend navigating media such as e-mail, the Internet, books and the time I spend coaching, I know very little of my time is spent on pure entertainment and consequently as a Fan. I have to admit that I find the some of the media torrent, which Gitlin finds so bothersome such as the Nike swoosh, to be inconsequential. It exists but I do not find myself caught up in it. Consumerism and consumer goods are not so overpowering that they drive every thing that we do. Gitlin has an over powering dislike of consumerism to the point that I take exception to some of the assumptions that he makes. For example, on Pg. 172 he writes "It is frequently claimed that communism broke down because television conveyed the luster of consumer goods, brought news of freedom from West Germany to East Germany, and so on." I really do disagree with this statement, because I do not believe that communism failed because of the 'luster of consumer goods.' Fans of Ronald Reagan will give him full credit for the fall of communism, due to our increased military spending coupled with the Soviets inability to keep up. What I think is more likely to be true is the price of oil brought down communism. I have read about this and also heard Thomas Friedman talk about it on NPR. The Soviet Union collapsed because when the price of oil dropped, oil revenues dropped, and it could no longer afford to met the basic needs of its' citizens.

I remain a fan in all regards to West Ham United. No matter the record or the style of play I will watch a game or follow the scores on their website. I find that I am a fan of the shows I like and a content critic when it comes to the rest, I do not easily pick up a new show to watch. The

shows I do watch on television fit my interests. I do not idly fill my time by watching television nor do I keep it on as background noise. The television is in many instances the *idiot box*. There is no comfort for me just in having the television on. Likewise I do not use the Internet when I am bored; I invariably have a reason for why I am on.

One of my biggest problems with the pace of the modern world, information overload or media unlimited as Gitlin calls it, is exemplified by Gitlin's book itself. Gitlin describes it on page 179 when he writes "What young people graced with disposable income encounter in American television shows, movies ... is a way of being in the world, the experience of a flow of ready feelings and sensations bobbing up, disposable, dissolving, segueing to the next and the next after that – all in all, the kinetic feel that I have tried to describe in this book." In other words a little bit of knowledge about a lot of things which of course means that nothing is understood in depth, with deep meaning. This is my problem with his book; I was unable to delve deeply into this topic because I felt like I was carried along at a frenetic pace that gave example after example of what is wrong with modern society but I was never able to gain a foothold to look more closely.

A concern I have about learning is that we are too superficial. We do not take enough time to truly learn the subject matter. For example, I find that there is so much that I want to teach my players about the game of soccer yet the topic is so broad that I am torn, because of time constraints, between trying to teach my players about all aspects of the game versus trying to develop their skills in one particular area. As a coach I have not heeded my own advice, because I believe we need to develop the ability to delve deeply into subject matter to truly be able to understand it, yet I do not always coach that way.

Also needed is the ability to focus our attention on one topic at a time and step away from multitasking, which spreads our attention out over a lot of different subjects all at the same time. Steven Johnson talks about the complexity of video games and the learning that takes place because the games are complex, they create problem solving situations. I agree with that, but what has to be kept in mind is the focus that this takes to make this happen. Multitasking can defeat any learning that may come from video games, because it diverts the individual's attention away from the game. This is also true when reading, writing, almost anything that needs focused attention. For example, as I am writing this I am trying to listen to Steven Johnson's NPR interview. As I am writing and thinking about what I want to write I almost totally tune out the radio interview and when I notice that I am listening to the radio interview then I am not writing. I do not multitask if I can help it and this just reinforces why.

While I am a fan and content critic when it comes to navigating the media torrent I actually find very little value in knowing that. I was so put off by Gitlin's view of modern life and that "the media-saturated life is something of a travesty of human existence" that I wasn't able to get beyond that into something constructive about how to handle the vast amounts of information we encounter on a daily basis.

*How can the implications for the learning society of Media Unlimited and other Unit 8 resources be addressed by individuals, educational (and perhaps other) institutions, and government?*

Information overload, as a result of access to more information than we know how to handle, is the issue that I think the government, schools and individuals have to deal with. Each has a role to play. The government's role is perhaps the simplest in that they have to set the expectations for schools, both K-12 and college. While the No Child Left Behind Act may be flawed in its' implementation, it is on target with the idea that we should raise expectations. This is the role that the government should have. Setting up well thought out, reasonable and research based expectations for schools. Expectations about what students should be learning but also expectations that incorporate our increasing understanding of how the brain works and how it handles an increasing flow of information or stimuli. For example, the issue of multitasking is one that more and more people are dealing with and it certainly seems to be one that younger and younger people are dealing with. And they think they are dealing with it effectively, but are they? Christine Rosen, in her article *The Myth of Multitasking*, writes that research "has also found that multitasking contributes to the release of stress hormones and adrenaline, which can cause long-term health problems if not controlled, and contributes to the loss of short-term memory." Certainly short-term memory loss and health problems caused by multitasking, which in turn is a method for dealing with information overload, are issues that the government needs to address when setting expectations for the educational community.

Schools, with or without a new set of expectations, have a role to play and it begins as early as preschool. In my Head Start program one of our primary goals is to help students become ready to learn in Kindergarten and beyond. It is not about academics but rather helping to create a student who is ready for learning at the next level. To achieve this we use the High/Scope curriculum that is based on active learning and as their website states "children learn through direct, hands-on experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas." This philosophy keeps us focused on children's interest and involved in active play. A victim of active play is the computer, which sees limited use, even though we get a surprising number of requests from parents to allow their children additional computer time. As our teachers develop their daily lesson plans they know they have to deal with many different types of information overload for students. They learn to spot when the music is too loud and energizing during clean up time or, believe it or not, when too many materials are available for students to use. Lowell Monke, in his article *The Human Touch*, said it well when he wrote "the task of early education is not merely to prepare students for making a living; it is to help them learn how to make a life." As we move beyond preschool the idea of preparing students for life is something that should be of utmost importance. Now some would make the argument that being up to date on the latest technology and its' uses prepares students for both work and life because it is such a large part of our everyday experience. However, Monke pointed out that "the general computer skills a youth needs to enter the workplace or college can easily be learned in one year of instruction during high school." Therefore, it is not imperative that schools spend their time and money on having all students understand the latest technological improvements. Rather we must acknowledge the type of world our students live in; one that is information rich and one that is always vying for our attention. Our students need the skills to handle this type of environment. Howard

Gardner's book *Five Minds for the Future* is about what skills students will need and the focus is on academics (the disciplined mind, synthesizing mind, and creating mind) and ethics (the respectful mind, and ethical mind). Maria Fusaro, in her article about Howard Gardner's book writes that "schools must respond to students' changing needs. In the working world, increasingly complicated issues will require solutions that cross disciplinary boundaries and go beyond "one-box" solutions." These are the goals that schools should have: strong academics and strong ethics. It is only from a deeply meaningful understanding of subject matter that students can cross disciplinary boundaries and apply their knowledge in new untested environments. Students with this background of strong academics and strong ethics will develop the discipline to handle the issue of information overload.

Individuals still have a role to play in all of this. We are the ones inundated with information and the ones we have to apply the knowledge that we have. As Gitlin writes "a resident of New York today is getting more sensations and of a more varied sort than the Neanderthal or early man of several hundreds of thousands of years ago." While Gitlin may have been overly pessimistic about how we are handling the amount of information we are exposed to nonetheless even those who are optimistic about this acknowledge that it does have to be managed. We have to manage our information in a way that allows us to grow as individuals and we have to have the discipline to do this. Governments can set policy and schools can set up programs to fulfill the policy wishes of the legislature but it is the individual who is the focus of the policies and the programs. This is what concerns me the most. We can have the best policy and best programs but in the end it comes down to how each individual decides to use the skills they have developed. I return to Lowell Monke, who wrote "So it seems that we are faced with a remarkable irony: that in an age of increasing artificiality, children first need to sink their hands deeply into what is real; that in an age of light-speed communication, it is crucial that children take the time to develop their own inner voice; that in an age of incredibly powerful machines we must first teach our children how to use the incredible powers that lie deep within themselves." Once we have been developed the tools to succeed we must take on the responsibility of doing so and unfortunately not every one will choose to do that.