

The Meaning Is the Message

Stephen Downes

May 14, 2007

The meaning is not in the words...



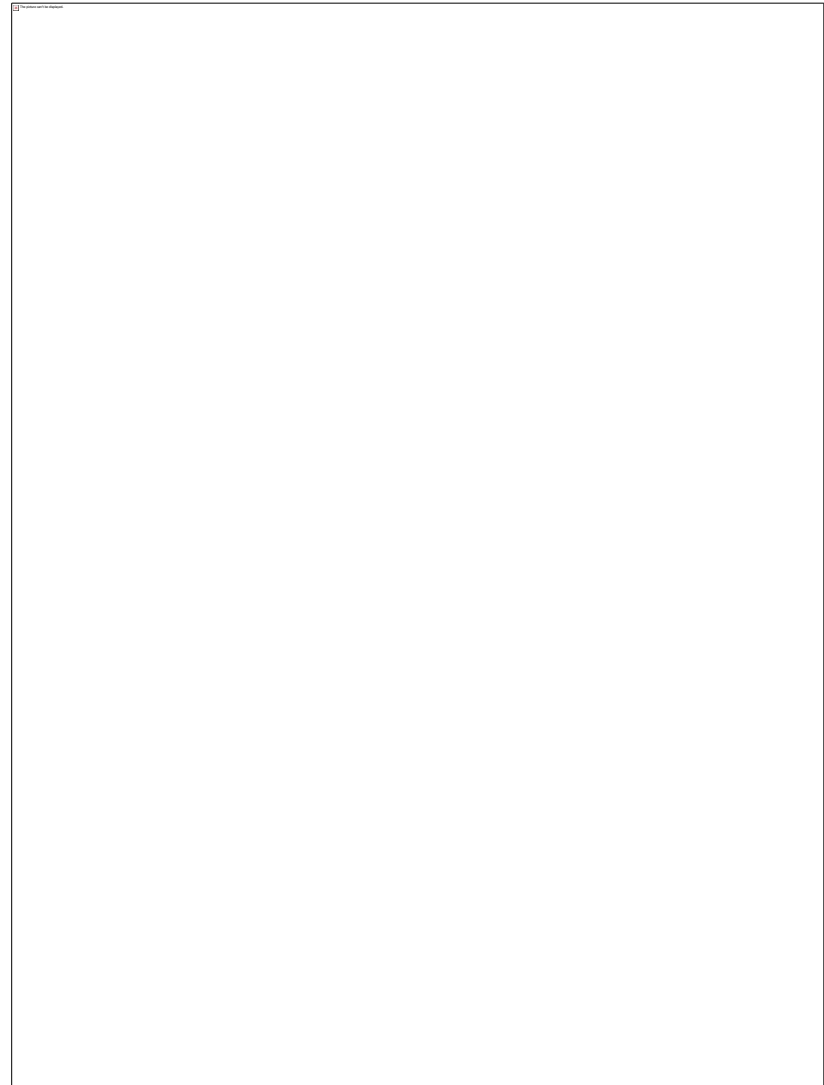
Does it matter
who's in the
picture?

The medium is the meaning

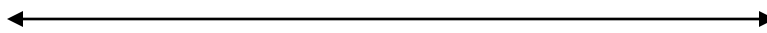
The traditional picture...

Media *stands*
for something

It represents -
re - presents -
something



sign

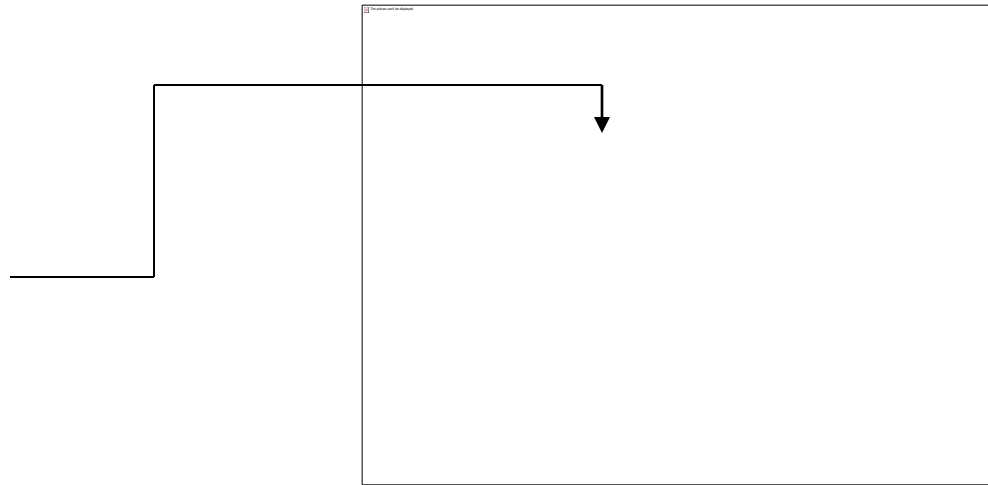


signified

But what?

By reference?

'train'



[By Stephen Fulljames](#)

What about...

“Brakeless trains are dangerous.”

The traditional picture...

Meaning is the result of a
process of inference...



... separating
the *signal*
(which
'signifies')
from the
noise...

... based on some
representation or model...



Sense

Inter

Form
intent

Translate

But...

There's no way
to reliably
extract the
meaning

<http://halfanhour.blogspot.com/2007/04/cat-blogging.html>

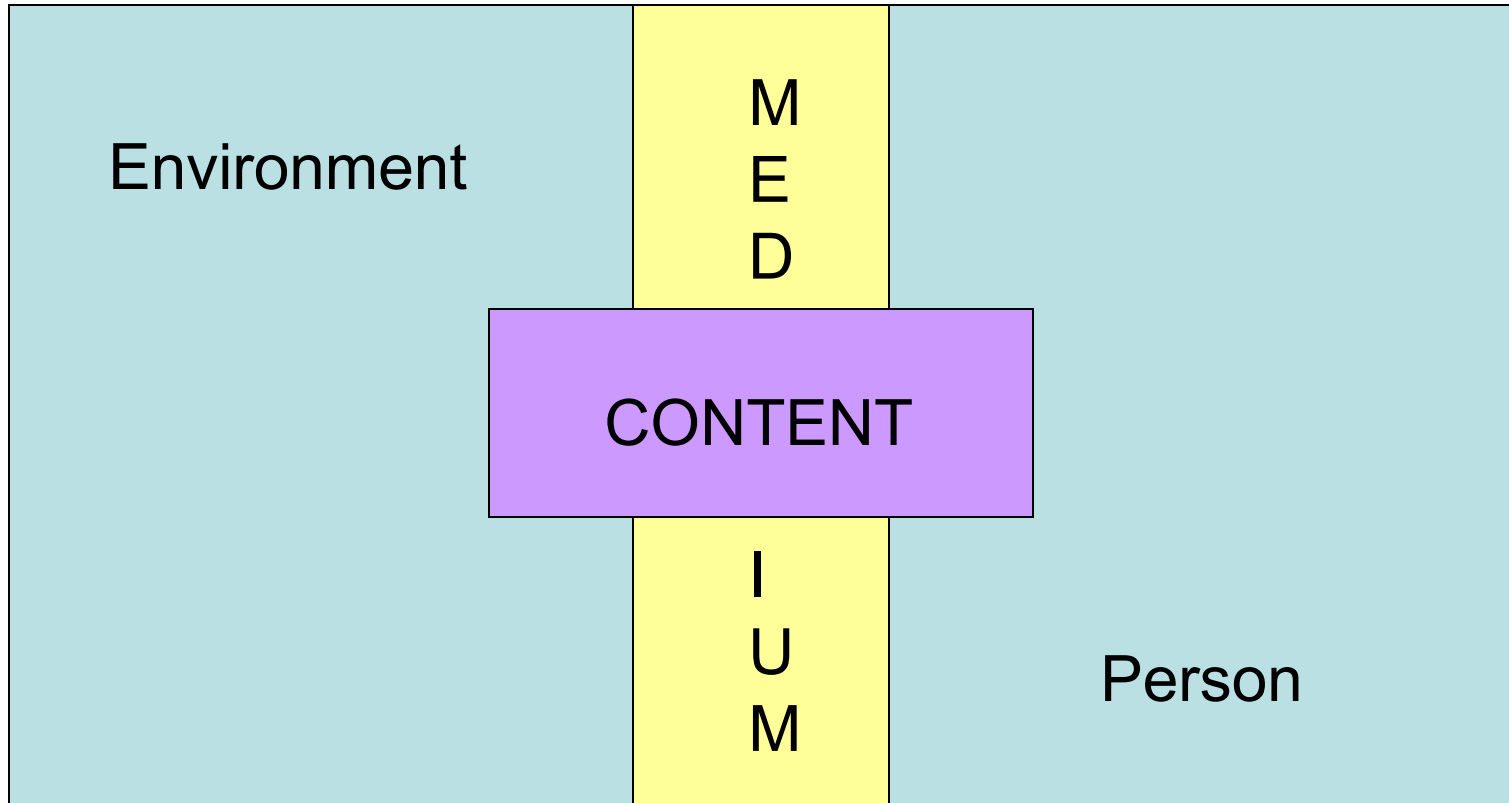


“I saw a cat
in Madrid.”

There is no ‘meaning’
to extract...

Each utterance is distinct, each one a new event

Context...

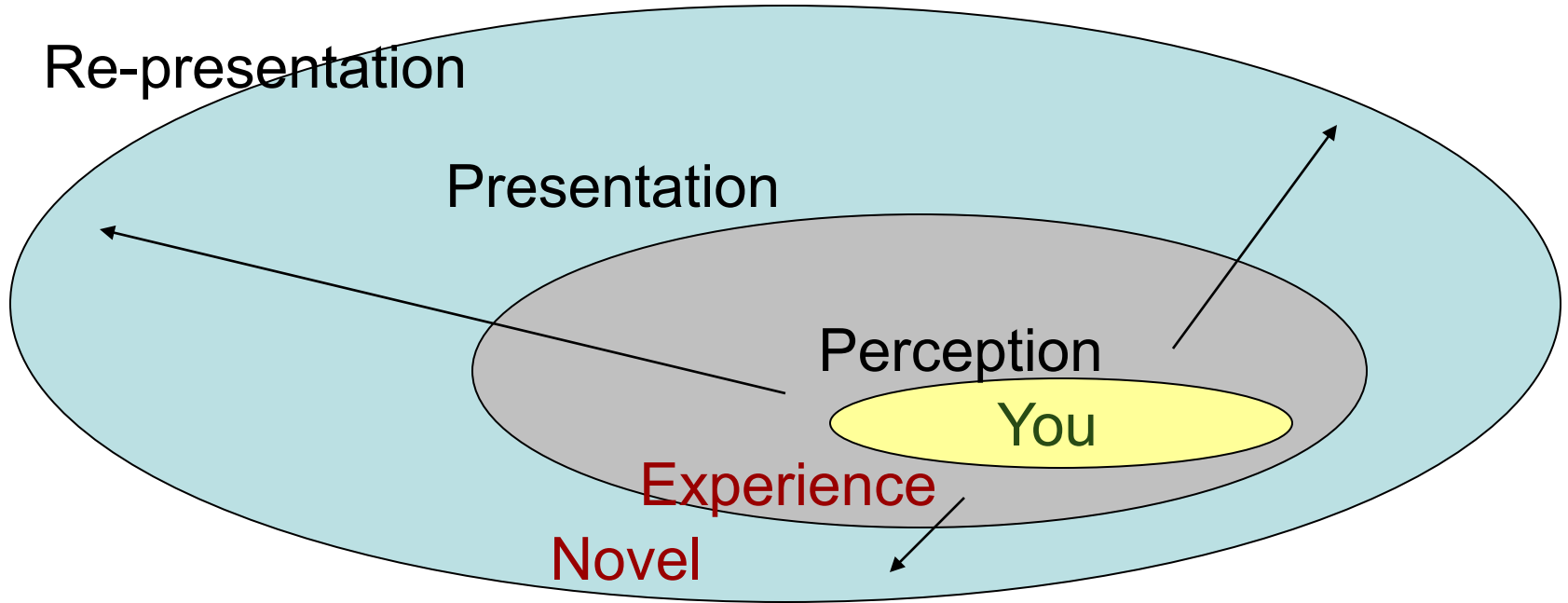


...meaning

“Content is a juicy
piece of meat” -
McLuhan 64 p. 32

The content of one medium is another medium...

64 p. 32



The user
is the
content



The meaning is
the user, not the
words

The representation isn't
the source of truth

You
are

TRADITIONAL

The world
impressed itself
on us

Reality

Truth

Perceptions

words

web

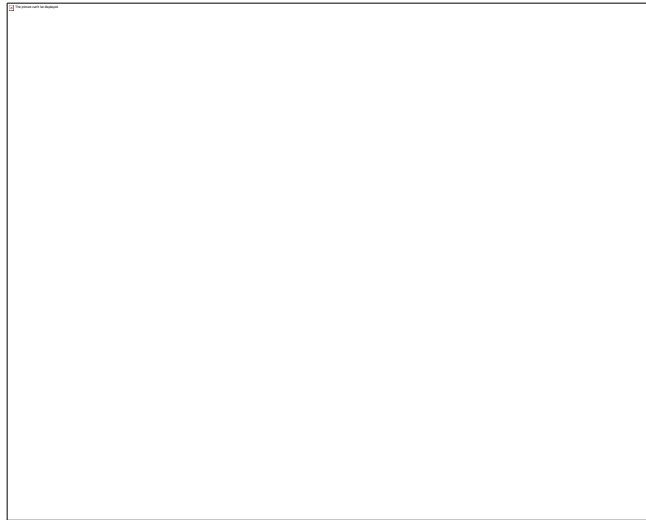
images

photos

voice

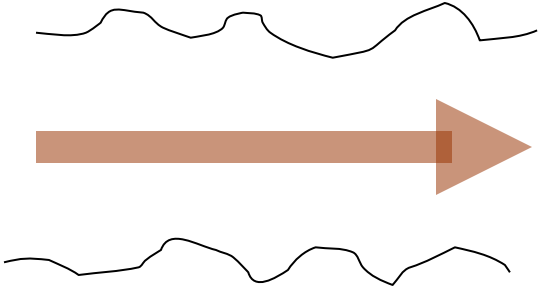
TODAY

We project ourselves
out through our content



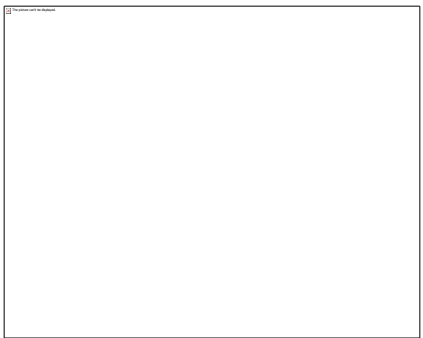
There is no short cut...

REALITY
JUSTICE
MORALITY



TRUTH
RIGHT
GOOD

This is a
model



So is
this

When we select media...

... we select the possibilities of expression

Text People

VS

Speech People

Language, grammar,
syntax

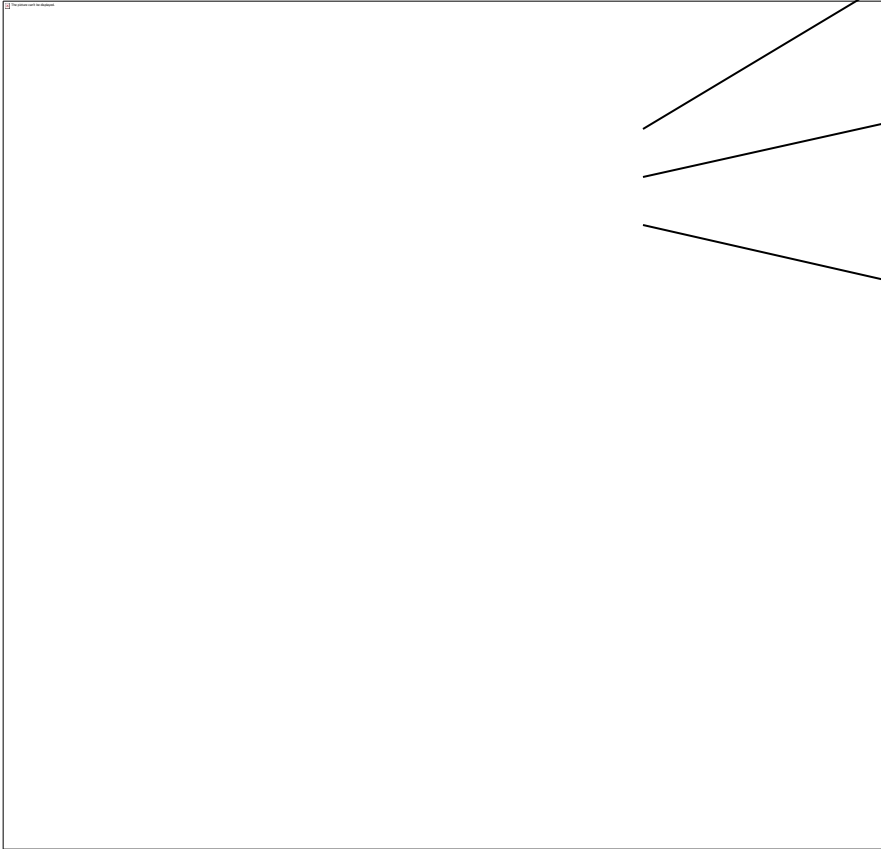
A world of universals
and truth

Sound, accent, tone

A world of sensations
and similarity

The meaning isn't *in* the text... it *is* the text

The message...



Your RRSP
deadline is today...

Your house went
up in value

Tax relief is expected
next week

... is the meaning

What we teach isn't what we *say*...



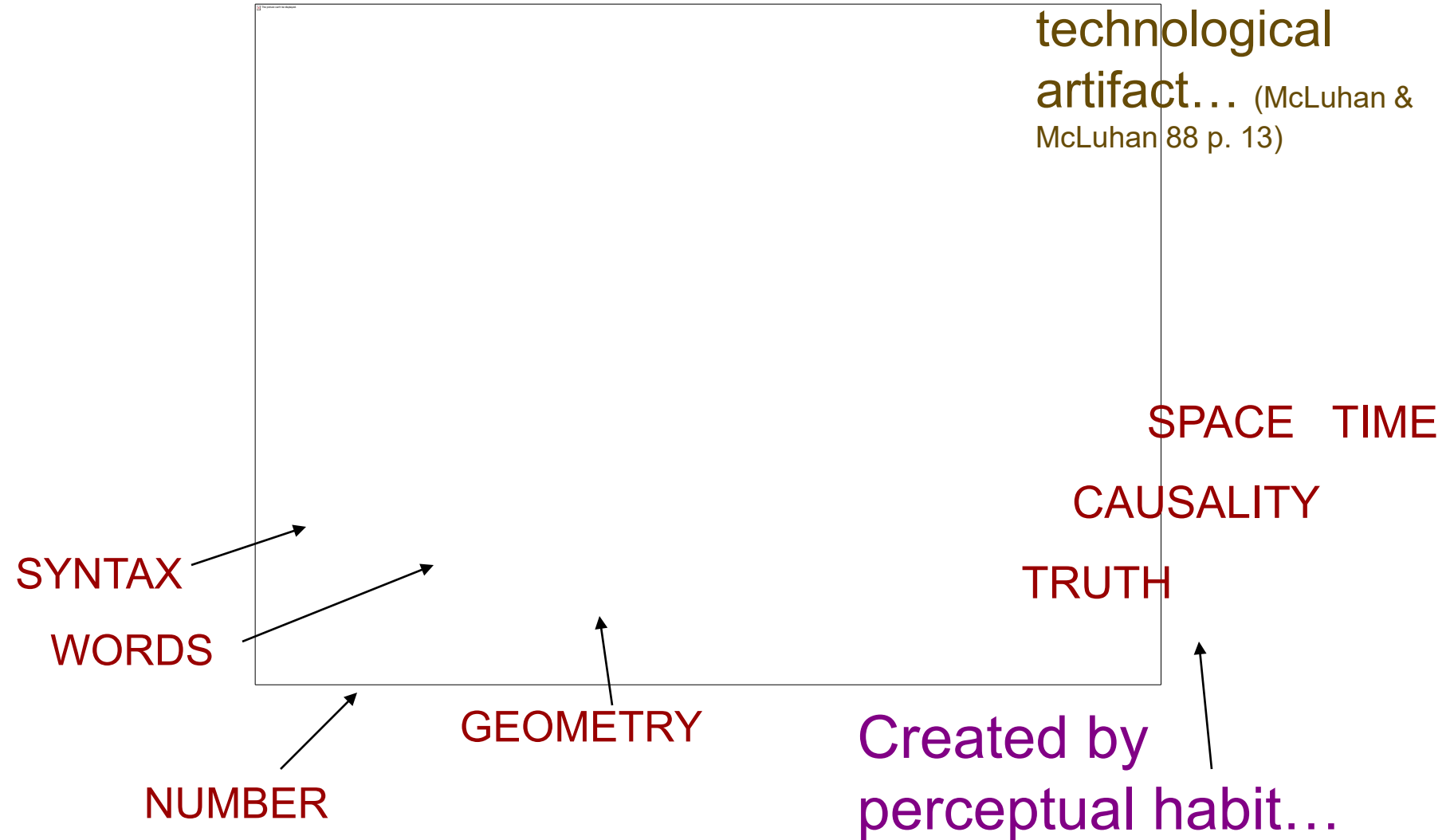
.. It's what we *model*

<http://aswangart.blogspot.com/2006/06/my-new-math-teacher.html>

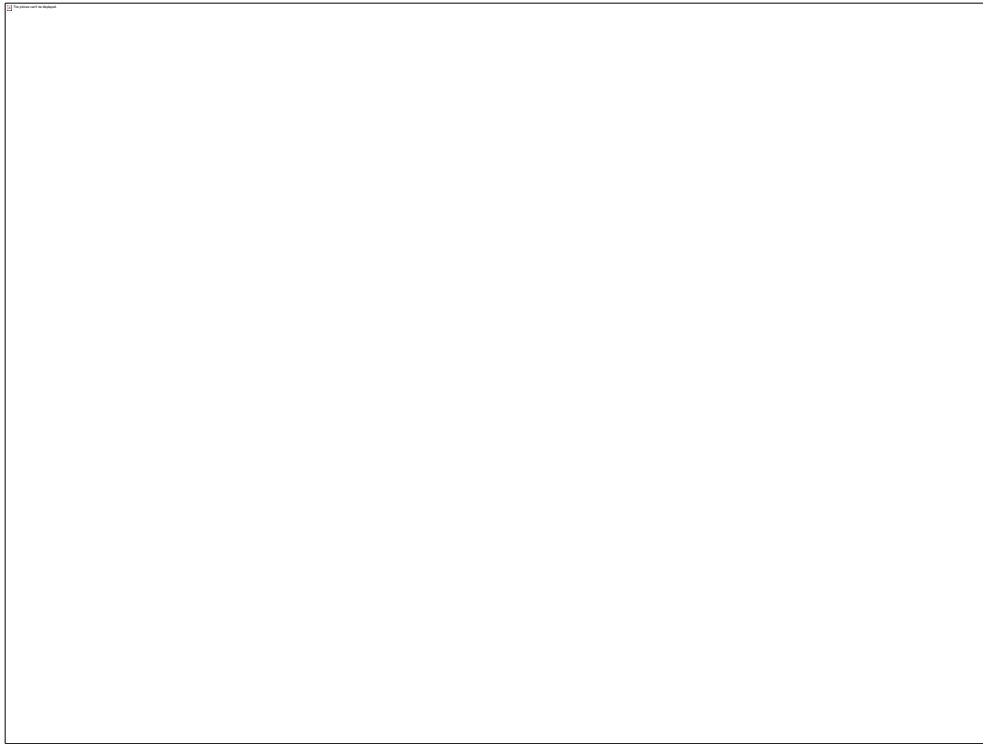
Two models...

Old Media...

Visual space is a technological artifact... (McLuhan & McLuhan 88 p. 13)



New Media...



ACOUSTIC

TACTILE

SIGHT

DIVERSITY

SIMILARITY

CONNECTION

LINK

Created by
perception...

Old Media...



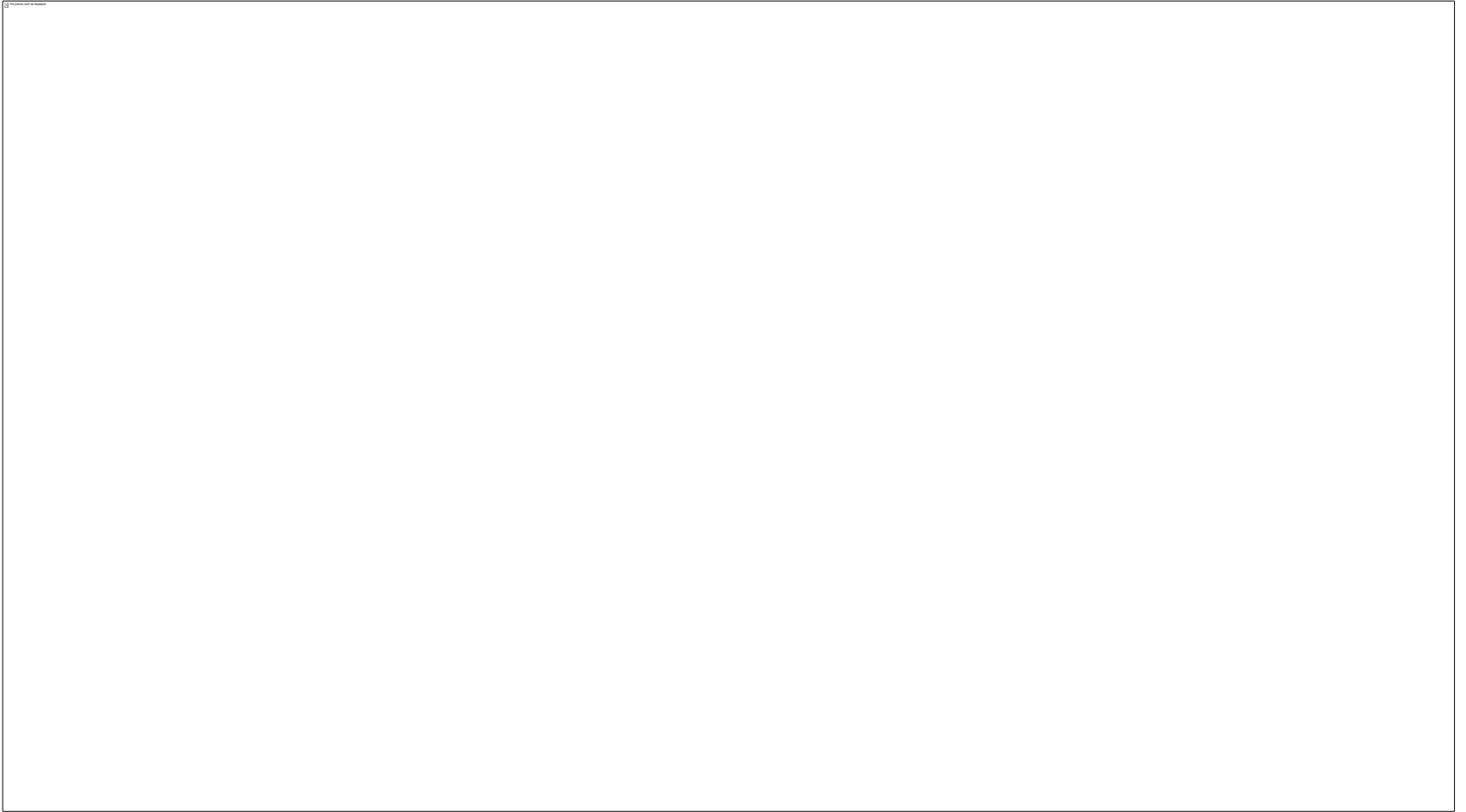
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Illuminated.bible.arp.jpg>

New Media...



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKTDRqQtPO8&feature=dir>

Old Media...

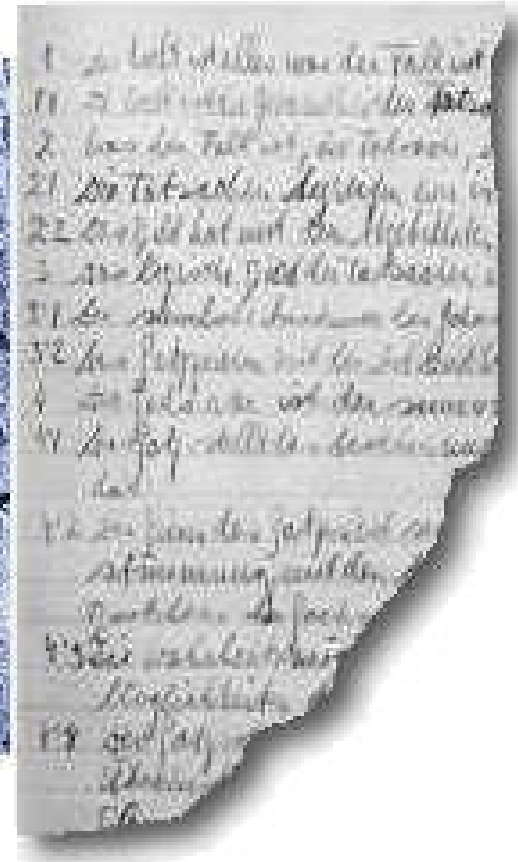
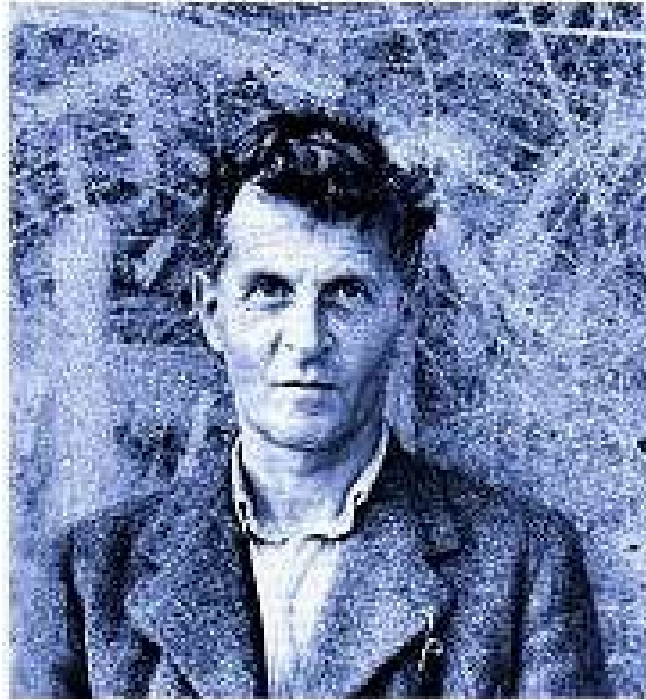


http://maadmob.net/maadmob_id/pres/beyond_hierarchy/images/hierarchy.png

New Media...



<http://www.theobvious.com/network/>



knowledge has many authors,
knowledge has many facets, it
looks different to each different
person, and it changes moment
to moment

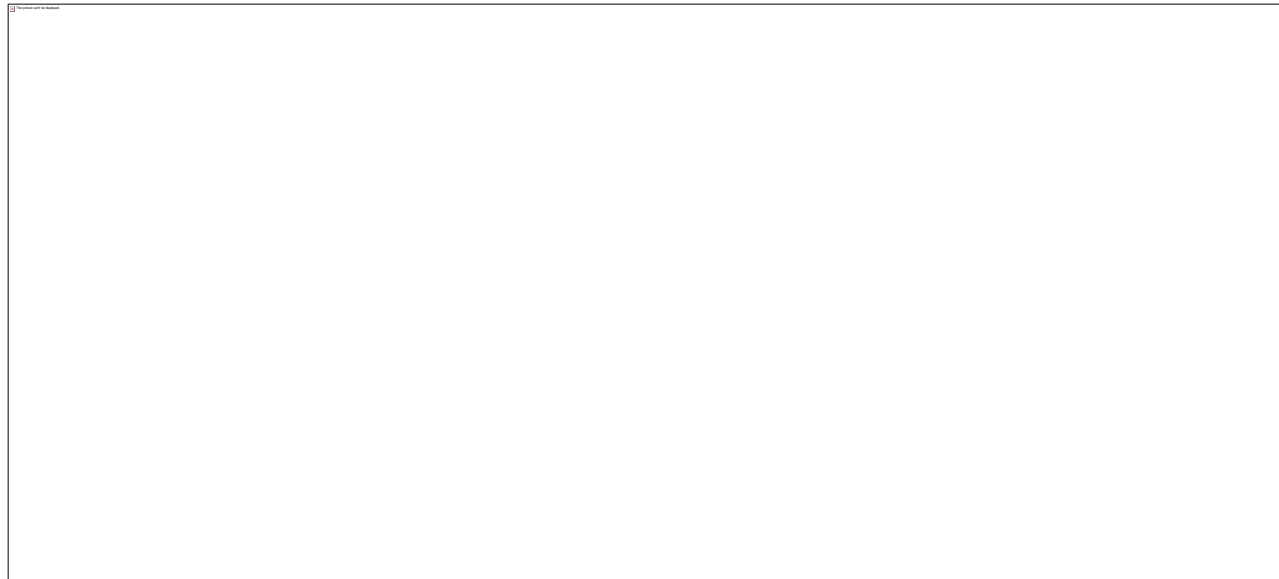
Somewhere along the line we adopted the presumption that what is text is objective



The abstract is more real than the real!

We teach sameness

We test for sameness



curriculum readings essay questions
standards categorization numbers
job descriptions hierarchy efficiency

But....

But what is learning really...?



Seeing patterns in the network -
not representations but
recognitions (re-cognitions)

Knowledge is like recognition

Learning is like perception

*the acquisition of new patterns
of connectivity*

through experience

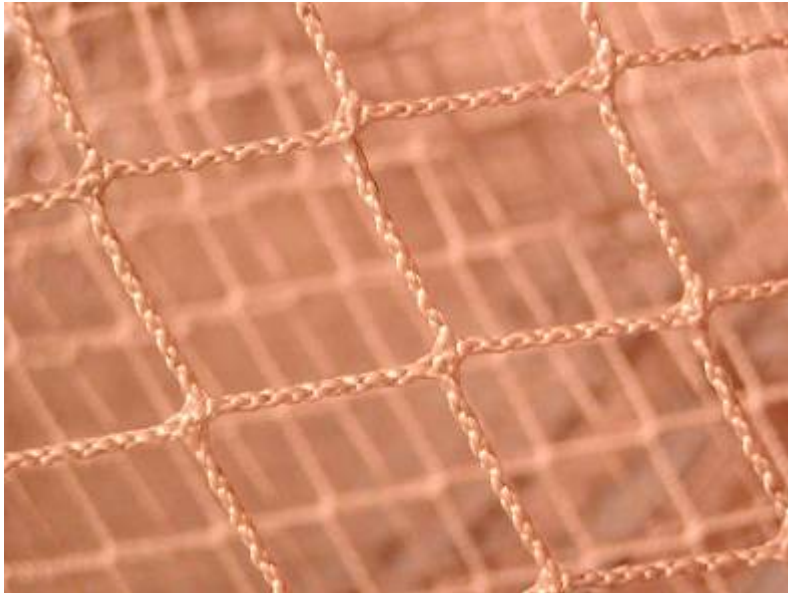


Hume



Patterns in the Mesh

the knowledge is in the network



Old: universals

- rules
- categories

New: patterns

- patterns
- similarities

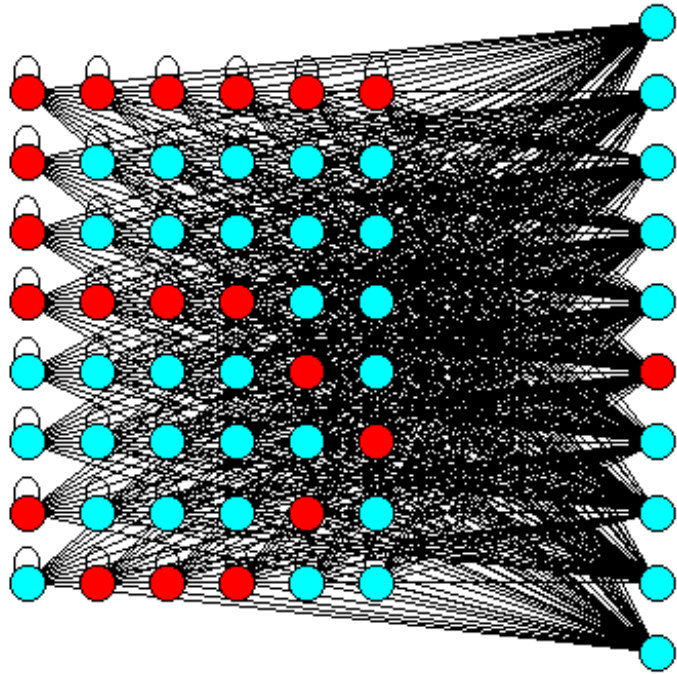
MEANING

the knowledge *is* the network

MEDIUM



Tenenbaum



Pattern Recognition...



Gibson

You already know this phenomenon,
you've already seen it

Emergent Learning

<http://growchangelearn.blogspot.com/2007/02/emergent-learning.html>

Tom Haskins

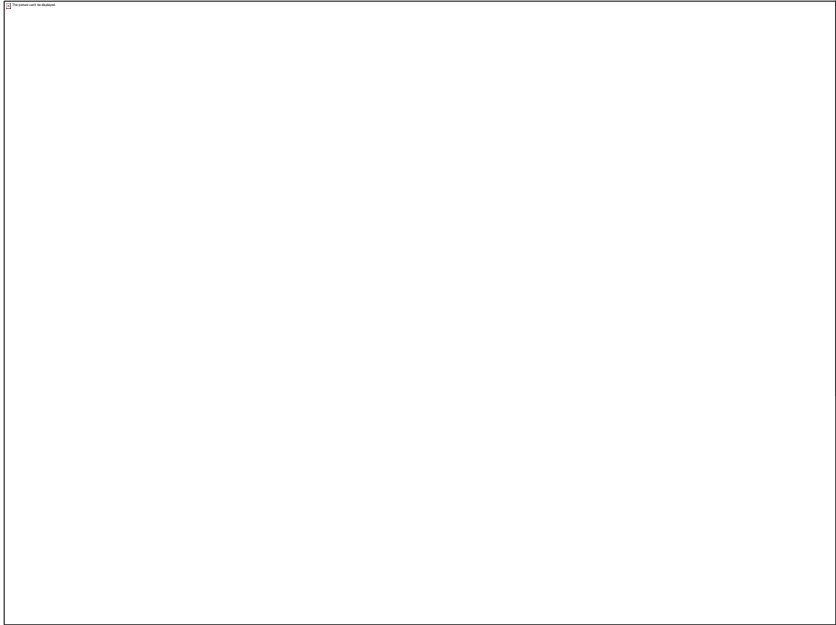


"Now I get it"
A-ha!
"Out of the blue"
"My mind leaped"
"Did an about-face"
"Shut up and did it"
Sudden breakthrough

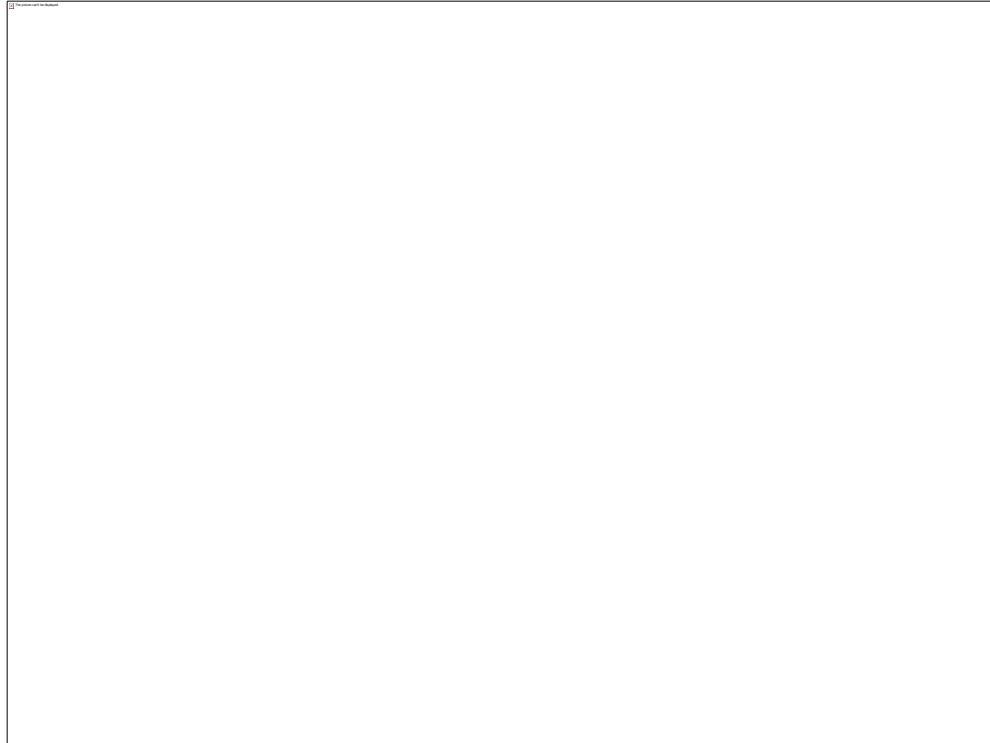
<http://www.downes.ca/files/osn.html>

The learning environment...

Not this....



... but this



Immersion, recognition & response

Environment over Learning Content

Serious
games?



http://www.gamasutra.com/features/20051104/demaria_01.shtml

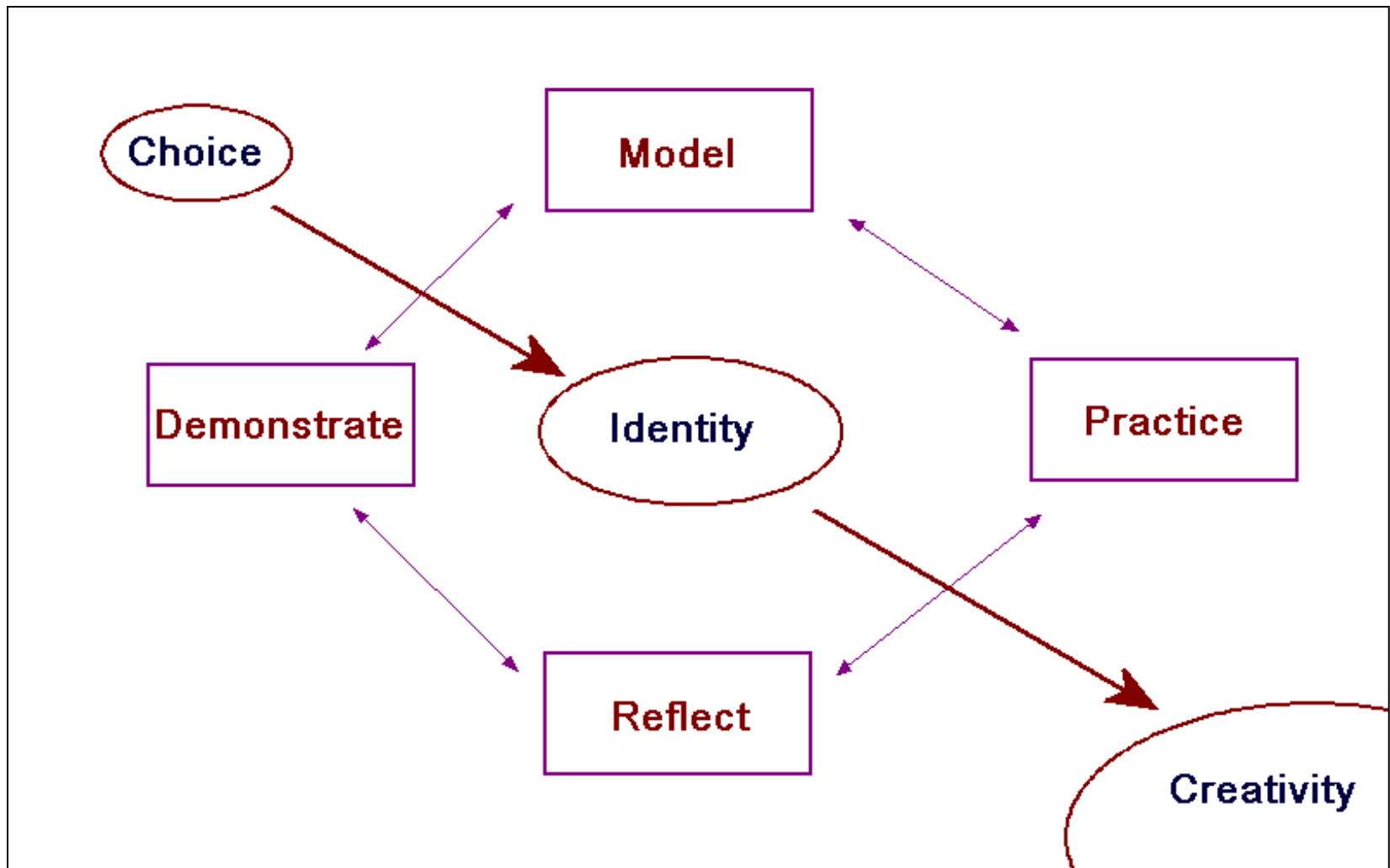
What is the *content* of the game 'Food Force'?

Personal Learning...

To *teach* is to *model* and to *demonstrate*
To *learn* is to *practice* and *reflect*



Our Learning Environment



We can get an idea of what the PLE looks like by drilling down into the pieces...

Model

- conceptual frameworks
 - wiki (wiki API, RSS)
 - concept maps (SVG, mapping format)
 - gliffy (SVG?)
- reference frameworks
 - Wikipedia
 - video / 2L 3D representation – embedded spaces

The question is – how to transport and represent models that are actually used?

Demonstrate

- reference examples

- code library
- image samples

- thought processes

- show experts at work (Chaos Manor)

- application

- case studies
- stories

The question is, how can we connect the learner with the community at work?

Practice

- scaffolded practice
 - game interfaces
 - sandboxes
- job aids
 - flash cards
 - cheat sheets
- games and simulations
 - mod kits
 - mmorpgs

The question is, how can we enable access to multiple environments that support various activities?

The question is, how can we assist people to see themselves, their practice, in a mirror?

Reflection

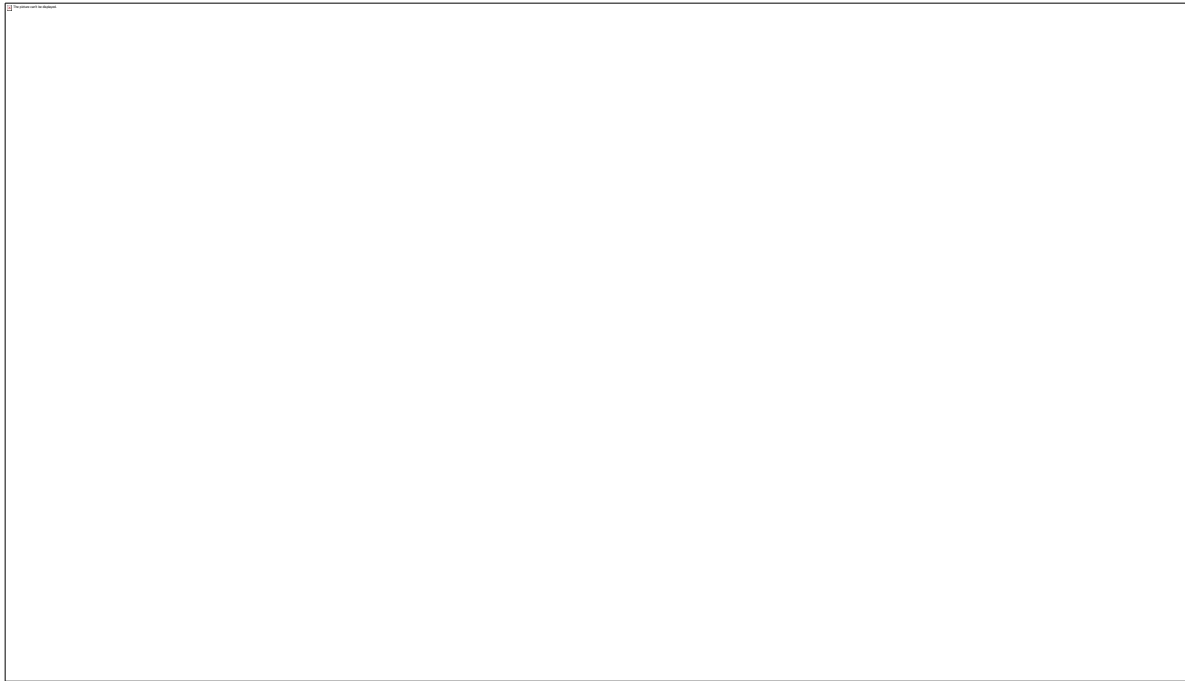
- guided reflection
 - forms-based input
 - presentations and seminars
- journaling
 - blogs, wikis
- communities
 - discussion, sharing

People talk about 'motivation'
– but the real issue here is
ownership

Choice – Identity - Creativity

- simulated or actual environments that present tasks or problems
- OpenID, authentication, feature or profile development
- Portfolios & creative libraries

Second Life Redux...



It's not the technology that's the problem

It's how it's used

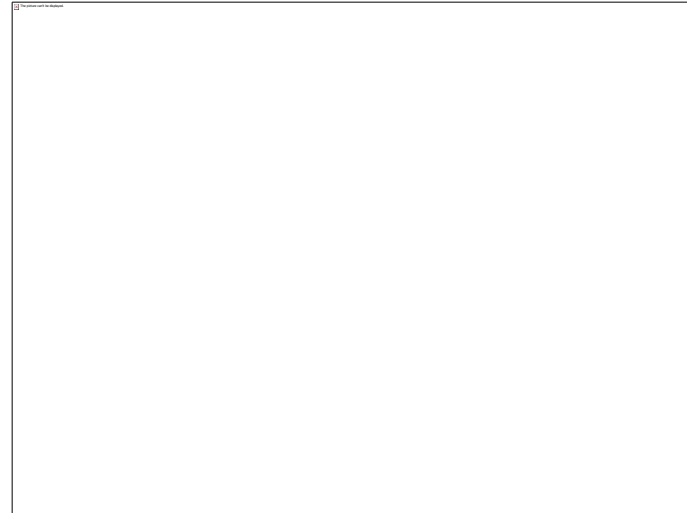
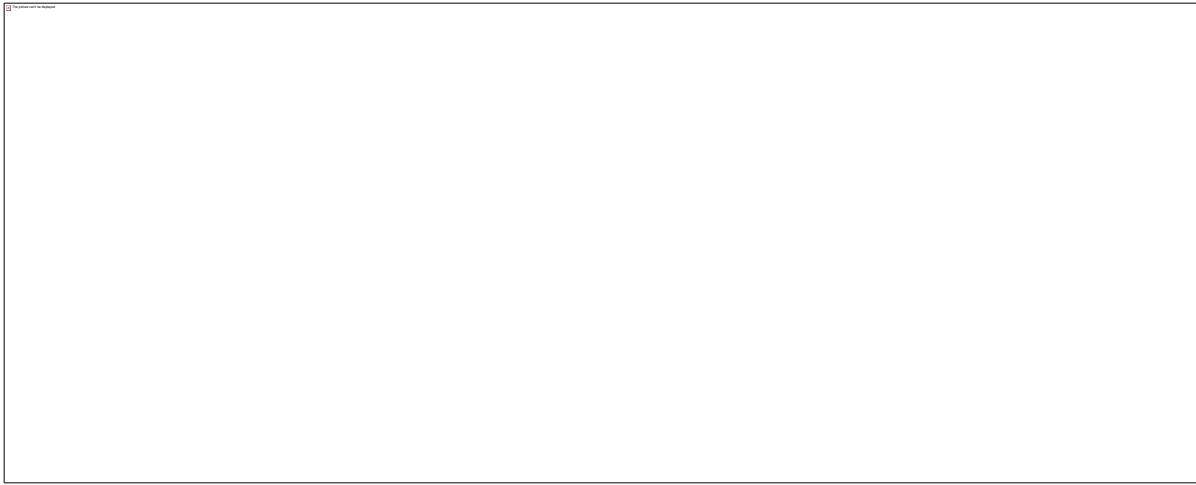
Wii

The challenge of learning design is not learning content



It's not in
making
things
specifically
for students

... but rather how we can project as much of *ourselves* online, how we can project our work, our hobbies, our lives



<http://www.downes.ca>