

## INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL LITERACY

---

### Abstract

*This issue of MIA is based on several of the papers presented at the Digital Literacy and Creative Innovation in a Knowledge Economy symposium held by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at QUT and the ARC Cultural Research Network in March 2007. The articles in this issue consider how the rapid development of digital technologies has changed the production and consumption of media content, altering the very nature of the relationship between 'producers' and 'consumers'.*

In March 2007, the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at QUT and the ARC Cultural Research Network co-sponsored a two-day research symposium entitled *Digital Literacy and Creative Innovation in a Knowledge Economy*. This special issue of *MIA* gathers revised versions of the key papers presented there.

Held at the impressive new State Library of Queensland, which also sponsored the event, the symposium brought together participants from education, government, industry and information services to consider how the rapid development of digital technologies has changed the production and consumption of media content, altering the very nature of the relationship between 'producers' and 'consumers'. While these developments have occurred across a range of media formats, they have been most pronounced in the context of user-generated content in digital media, from interactive media-sharing web sites (like YouTube and Jumpcut) to online social networks (like MySpace and Facebook).

Digital media are now a part of the everyday lives of most people in industrialised nations. As a result, the question of what kind of 'digital literacy' might broaden participation in and uplift standards of production and consumption in digital environments now demands serious critical attention. The answers to that question will have broad implications for our understandings not only of media pedagogies and histories, but also of citizenship in mediatised societies. Sir Ken Robinson's contribution, based on his keynote address at the symposium, calls for the radical transformation of public education, so that it can harness digital technologies and human creativity as driving forces of change in an era marked by crises. John Hartley, Kelly McWilliam, Jean Burgess and John Banks take up the challenge by considering what form of education might best suit digital literacy, before

---

examining examples of its informal propagation in digital storytelling workshops, on the photo-sharing website Flickr and in the online game *Fury*.

Mark Gibson, Catharine Lumby and Kath Albury, and Gerard Goggin variously engage with public panics around ‘falling’ literacy standards in schools in particular, and across popular culture in general. In their respective articles, the authors argue for a more measured approach to investigating the potential of and challenges for digital literacy. Gibson uses Kevin Rudd’s 2007 election promise of a laptop for every high-school student to consider digital literacy’s potential for educational renewal. Goggin argues that mobile phone culture can productively inform our understandings of both ‘digital literacy’ and ‘literacy’ in general. Lumby and Albury use the 2008 Australian Senate inquiry into the sexualisation of children in the media to call for a reframing of media literacy as a participatory process for children and young people.

Also focused on the interstices of digital media and youth culture are contributions by Ellie Rennie and Julian Thomas, and Greg Hearn and Justin Brow. Where Rennie and Thomas conceptualise digital literacy as a competency bridge between young people’s informal media use and full participation in the creative economy, Hearn and Brow discuss a ‘virtual creative ecology’ that they have developed for young or otherwise emerging creatives to investigate the digital literacy involved in the education-to-work transition. Susan Luckman and Jerry Watkins shift the discussion of digital literacy to institutional contexts. From her perspective as a university teacher and researcher, Luckman calls for a digital literacy that empowers greater numbers of students towards fuller participation in digital media, without falling prey to either the uncritical optimism or pessimism of much popular debate. Watkins proposes digital literacy as a potential interface between cultural institutions and their communities, to facilitate passive cultural audiences to become active cultural participants.

Melissa Gregg and Catherine Driscoll, Kate Oakley, and John Quiggin and Jason Potts take broader perspectives. Gregg and Driscoll look at the ways online communities recast everyday intimacies through time and space, concluding that the enormous popularity of ‘friend networking systems’ can only be understood as a response to the earlier emergence of digital literacy. Oakley considers the relationship between debates over arts and digital literacy in education, to examine the roles that both serve in preparing citizens for the creative workforce. Finally, John Quiggin and Jason Potts, who are both economists, take a different approach to thinking about digital literacy: their piece stages a debate on the nature of non-market production in emerging digital media, drawing attention to long-held assumptions about the economics of the internet as well as highlighting the private and public value of digital literacy.

In all instances, digital literacy is discussed with reference to contemporary examples that reject the imprecise rhetoric of some commentators, moving public debate forward in productive consideration of its application and development for the use and empowerment of current and future citizens.

We are grateful to *MIA* editor (and issue contributor) Gerard Goggin and the rest of the editorial board for their openness to and support of this special issue

---

topic. We would also like to thank Sue Jarvis for her flawless work and support in bringing this issue to completion. Finally, we acknowledge the support of the Australian Research Council's Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation and Cultural Research Network for supporting the event, and several of the research projects, that made this special issue possible.

**Kelly McWilliam** is an ARC Postdoctoral Research Fellow (Industry) in the Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology.

**John Hartley** is a Distinguished Professor, ARC Federation Fellow and Research Director at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation, QUT.

**Mark Gibson** is a Senior Lecturer and Academic Course Coordinator in the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University.