Chapter 11
Laugh with Us, Not at Us: Parody and Networked Learning

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11.1 Preamble

Regular attenders at networked learning conferences will probably agree that there is already a great deal of laughter there, especially during informal breaks. This laughter can be generative, leading to community development, creativity and insights, as well as further networking. Stimulated by reading Bakhtin's observations on laughter and parody across several works, I wondered whether the use of parody to activate laughter could have a potential contribution to a better understanding of the networked learning community and its practices. The template guidelines in the second quotation above suggest that this would be a risky undertaking. But I decided nevertheless to make a minor attempt at parodying networked learning papers through imitation of their themes and structures to see whether they were recognisable and also whether thinking about parody might give us something to discuss about our dissemination practices.

My attempt to parody networked learning papers—and ask questions about why this does not happen more often—did provoke some interesting reactions at the Networked Learning Conference 2018. Throughout the conference, I appeared to need no introduction, even to people I had not met previously, because they had either attended or heard about 'that paper'. Many successive speakers felt obliged to preface their presentation by acknowledging that they had, or had not, included one of the tropes I seemed to have identified as 'essential' in a networked learning paper.

'Laughter makes things close and familiar.' M.M. Bakhtin (1986) From 'Notes made in 1970-71'
'Please note that humour and irony are difficult to translate.' Template/guidelines for NLC papers

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Parody does aim to get people talking, especially about conventions and cultural practices. In that sense, then, my paper was successful, even though (ironically) I had ended up concluding that my own attempt at parody was a failure. All I had managed to do was parody titles and subtitles of papers—and much of that parody would apply to papers at many academic conferences in the social sciences. It also seemed that parody is not something that networked learning participants often use in their writing. Yet using my titles as prompts did give me a way into talking about networked learning writing and practices and especially their intertextuality.

My main influence, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), was introduced to the west through the concept of intertextuality, coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s. Bakhtin (or his translators) did not use the word; however, his work on the dialogic and the notion of 'double-voiced discourse' influenced Kristeva (1967/1980) in developing her idea of intertextuality where one text is shaped through knowledge of another. Parody is just one form of intertextuality; its relationship to existing genres, conventions, institutions and practices relies on its ability to allude to these in a way that can be recognised, imitate them and provoke laughter.

Double-voiced discourse refers to two (or perhaps more) speakers in one utterance—each having different intentions. One is actually making the current utterance; the other's words are refracted through it (Bakhtin 1981a). The utterer might be a novelist presenting a character's view or perhaps an academic using a citation to make a point. In the case of parody, the parodist relies on the hearer's recognition of what is being parodied to make a new point with the refracting discourse. This may involve critique of what is being parodied but is equally likely to imply critique of something else. Parodying academic practices provides an opportunity to bring out constraints, influences or taboos in those practices—and to ask questions about them.

What follows is a slightly extended version of the paper submitted to the conference, updated to incorporate references to papers presented in Zagreb in May 2018 and to reflect the dialogic nature of the conference, its papers and its participants' work.

11.2 Introduction: How the Paper Was Planned

The paper was stimulated by a comment from a keynote speaker at the Networked Learning Conference in 2014, Steve Fuller. During the conference, he had said something along the lines of: 'Networked learning doesn't have a distinctive literature of its own'. One inference from this might be that networked learning does not present a unified field of study. It could also mean that the phenomenon of networked learning is not easily understood and its ways of thinking and practising (McCune and Hounsell 2005) are not obvious. The main message for me was that networked learning writing is not recognised as a separate field or genre, which would mean that it would not be easy to parody it. This, however, did not prevent Professor Fuller from attempting to parody the phenomenon of networked learning, gently making fun of the people who practise it and identifying us as a community. In his tribute to the lecture he speculated:

> I know nowadays, especially to people in your community, the lecture is a kind of obsolete thing, you know, that in some sense can be very easily replaced by MOOCs, and stuff like this…. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujdnmk2UH-U (13.23–14.00)

This is arguably travesty rather than parody, though parody is implicated and I hope to draw out the differences in order to make a point about some dangers of parody.

Though Fuller was not discussing parody, his observation and mimicry stuck with me and resurfaced as I was reading Bakhtin's work about parody and renewal. Bakhtin (1895–1975) is particularly noted for his work on dialogism and carnival in literature, extending beyond literary criticism (and indeed rejecting some of the precepts of formal criticism). His work has made valuable contributions to social philosophy, language, cultural studies and education, among other fields, though, as with all respected names and in keeping with his ideas, there are various debates about his meanings. For Bakhtin, parody plays a key role in resisting practices that tend to unify or be authoritarian, by bringing them to our attention through laughter. At its best, parody does not destroy its target but opens up the possibility of dialogic discourse and continuity, especially about aspects of a practice that have become invisible or taken for granted. I wondered whether such forms of renewal can be seen in our own field of networked learning and whether parody might be of value to our continuity, either for us to use to expose and challenge other practices or as a way to refresh our own.

A thought experiment on how to parody writing about networked learning then quickly led to my headings for this paper—though I was hesitant to claim the paper as itself more of a parody than any other academic paper is. The result can be seen in Fig. 11.1.

Parody used like this relies on over-elaborated imitation of recognisable practices—parody fails if its antecedents are not recognisable—with an implied critique or gentle teasing ultimately inviting people to laugh. While provoking recognition and some amusement was my main intention, I found my parody remarkably helpful in planning this paper quickly (though not, I have to say, for writing it quickly).

1 Agonise over definitions	Defining networked learning and parody
2 Cherry-pick antecedents from the community	Related themes in earlier papers
3 Come up with a novel metaphor	Where is the novel in networked learning?
4 Share examples of boundary crossing	Crossing the boundary into satire and travesty
5 Summarise in three categories	Genre, intertextuality and multimodality
6 Use/create expressions with post(-) as prefix	Pre-parodic networked learning
7 Set the study up as an alternative to tradition	What makes networked learning the new traditional?
	Inconclusion: unbounded territory
Plan for parody of networked learning paper	This paper's headings

Fig. 11.1 Parodying a genre to help plan academic writing

Fig. 11.2 Reading jester

These headings sometimes imitate other people's—and my own—style in networked learning writing. Sometimes the headings use a word's ambiguity (such as the word 'novel') or reverse what is typical (the prefix pre- instead of post-). A parodist looks for opportunities to subvert or draw attention to anything that looks like the 'authoritative' approach—or, alternatively, to anything that appears to be veering too far from the norm for no good reason. To parody the phenomenon of networked learning or networked learning as a field of study would not entail destroying it, but would imply opening it up to further development and renewal while constraining its worst excesses, if it has any. The ease of generating the headings did not surprise me: imitation is key to academic discourse, and I have used parody in my teaching sometimes to encourage students to 'try on the peculiar ways…' (Bartholomae 1985:134) of academic writing.

However, my parody here only served to create the plan of the paper. I did not really feel able to parody networked learning; rather, I was asking why it is not yet happening, or not much. I used the plan and its parodic observations to draw out my answers to this and consider the implications. I was also curious about whether writers in networked learning had ever used parody themselves. I accompanied my presentation with the image of the 'reading jester'[1] (Fig. 11.2) who questioned and provoked as appropriate, but fairly gently. The role of the fool or jester in education is recognisable—several people in the audience nodded when I mentioned it. It is risky though, and it may be important not to go too far as a jester-teacher even though it may help in creating an online presence (Macleod and Ross 2011), nor indeed as a jester-presenter, though it may make people look again at their practices. However, as Macleod and Ross also argue, some risk-taking is valuable and indeed may be unavoidable in teaching and presenting.

To help me with my limited parody, I drew on titles from previous conferences. In my presentation (though not in my original paper) I mentioned the pervasive use of colons in titles, itself a topic of academic study (Hartley 2007). A quick look at the 2018 conference's papers indicated that 50% of them contained a colon, which seems to be the average for education papers (Hartley 2007). This means that

[1] By Bill Nye (?) (Nye, Bill: "Bill Nye's History of England" (1900)) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

networked learning as a field cannot really be distinguished on the basis of its 'titular colonicity' (Dillon 1981) even though its authors would clearly be on the right side of good academic practice in Dillon's own parodic work. I leave it to the reader to check the credentials of the authors in the current volume in this regard.

11.3 Defining Networked Learning and Parody

11.3.1 My Parody: Agonise over Definitions

Authors have been encouraged by editors and reviewers at various stages of the networked learning conference lifespan to be explicit about their understanding of networked learning. Many authors of networked learning papers allude to the following definition:

> Learning in which information and communication technology (ICT) is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners; between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources. (Goodyear et al. 2004:1)

Some may express concerns about what this definition masks, such as 'complexity of the social nature' (Boon and Sinclair 2012: 275), and others may wish to augment it (e.g. Dohn 2016: 30, who added its mediating role between contexts). Nevertheless, the frequency of unequivocal citation of this definition does suggest its authority and the fact that writers feel on safe ground using it. Masking, mediating and responding to authority underpin some emergent themes in this paper, so the definition and commentaries serve as a useful starting point.

It is perhaps unkind of me to suggest that networked learning writers 'agonise over definitions' but I know that I do, as indicated by the Boon and Sinclair citation above. As a reviewer of networked learning papers, I have seen many papers that start this way. As an academic, I have also seen many student assignments that do this, often not so eloquently as the paper writers as it is a difficult task to master effectively. Defining is part of the practice of academic writing, probably across most academic fields. So, just like the colonic titles, agonising over definitions is not peculiar to the field of networked learning.

Definitions are continuing to be a challenge for this current study, though: 'the discussion of parody is bedevilled by disputes over definition, a fruitless form of argument unless there are matters of substance at stake' (Dentith 2000: 6) There are matters of substance. Writers on parody, for example, Dentith himself and also Margaret Rose (1993), allocate a considerable quantity of writing to definition, distinguishing parody from other forms of derivative work, and changes over times from ancient through medieval to postmodern. I use Fig. 11.3 here to show my own preoccupations and to indicate how my discussion of parody might veer into other topics. Some of these words can be found being used interchangeably in writing on this topic and also in dictionaries where parody may be defined as satire (for example) and vice versa. I shall suggest that the words on the right of the figure are those that may be cultivated by the networked learning community for positive ends.

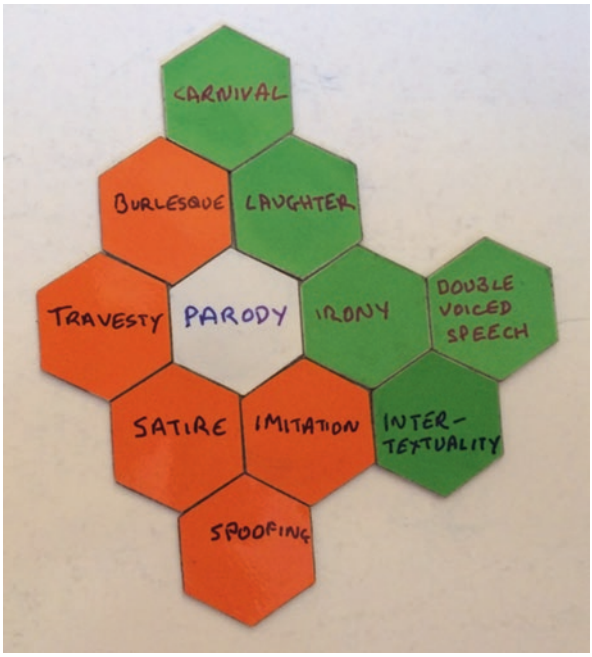

Fig. 11.3 Parody in relation to associated topics

I shall not rehearse all the definitions associated with this diagram here, but will make reference to some of them as I unfold my case. However, I shall take Dentith's preliminary definition as my own starting point, though it should be noted that he qualifies it through reference to a spectrum of cultural practices which may go under different names. He does also mention laughter a great deal in the build-up to the definition below:

> Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice. (Dentith 2000: 8)

The cultural productions are my main focus: the writing associated with networked learning conferences. However, I have also added networked learning practices to my interest: the practices referred to in these publications and shared—or even experienced—at networked conferences themselves. Dialogue following the 2018 conference (in this case, with my editor) has alerted me to the value of distinguishing between the academic *field* and the *phenomenon* of networked learning, or indeed any other form of academic practice. While this was a concern throughout, it is useful to make it explicit and I had elided field and phenomenon in my original paper. We will not necessarily have a distinctive form of writing associated with a distinctive phenomenon or practice; however, it is worth asking 'why not?' As already mentioned, I have found parody to be a useful tool in my networked teaching practice; why might it not also be useful for writing in the field of study?

My main influence from the literature on parody is from Bakhtin who is also a strong (though not unchallenged) influence on Dentith. I shall turn to a closer examination of Bakhtin's work shortly, including reference to some of Dentith's reservations; first, I explore what it might be possible to say about networked learning and the use of parody (not a great deal yet, as it turns out).

11.4 Related Themes in Earlier Papers

11.4.1 My Parody: Cherry-Pick Antecedents from the Community

Cherry-picking (seeking examples to make an explicit point rather than ensuring representation) is frowned on in academic writing, but given such a prolific output from the networked learning community over two decades, what else can we do? A timely call from in the summer of 2017 for networked learning writers to reflect on the conference's values (Hodgson and McConnell 2018, and Chap. 1 of this volume) prompted my own recollections on the output from these conferences. Here is a section of my response:

> Perhaps there have been some paradigm wrestling matches – tussles between familiar theoretical perspectives and practices, deprecated ones, and emergent ones. There has been an interesting extension of focus and domains, first towards informal education and then towards activist perspectives. There has perhaps been a shift from technologies for teaching to technologies for coding – and what happens to the data from these. These are probably natural responses to some of the perceived threats to our institutions and values that have also featured strongly in recent years.

This speaks to a dynamic and responsive context likely at least to coincide with Bakhtin's preoccupations with the dialogic, if not specifically invoking parody. The conversations have built on each other over the years and a glance at indexes in the post-conference books will show much citation of key players—for example, Hodgson and Dirckinck-Holmfeld, among others. Yet the key writers do not overdominate; there is a healthy mix of established and newer voices and it is good to see how some of the latter start to earn their own place in the index. An index scan would not support my search for parody or laughter, though—but there is plenty on dialogue and boundaries (in some, though not all indexes) as suggested in my reflection above. So a search for papers in the post-conference books that might themselves involve parody or discussions of it proved fairly fruitless, yet I was aware of much laughter and some parody during the conferences themselves. I extended my search to include a quick review of paper topics. I found some promising looking titles from the previous three conferences:

- What did the Romans ever do for us? 'Next generation' networks and hybrid learning
- Becoming jelly: A call for gelatinous pedagogy within higher education

- The glow of unwork? Issues of portrayal in networked learning research
- Where have all the students gone? They are all on Facebook Now

I have added another from the 2018 conference:

- Making digital compost: place-responsive pedagogy at a distance

These are analysed below for the parodical promise suggested by the title.

What did the Romans ever do for us? 'Next generation' networks and hybrid learning resources. Elaine Thomas, Steve Walker. 2012 Conference.

This title caught my attention because the initial question would be instantly recognisable, to some, as coming from a parody (which was also a satire on religion), the Monty Python film 'Life of Brian' (1979). Used in this context, the question is an example of what Dentith (2000:7) refers to as one of 'those glancing parodic allusions which are to be found very widely in writing'. The reference to 'next generation' suggests that there may be some parodic work around old and new—and might even evoke memories of the TV programme *Star Trek*. Interestingly, in the full paper, the question is used no longer in parody, but instead for literally exploring how technologies might support people investigating artefacts from the Roman Empire. The lack of parody as a theme in the paper does not disappoint me, though: the discussion about blurring boundaries between technology and the physical world is fascinating.

*Be*coming jelly: A call for gelatinous pedagogy within higher education. Søren S.E. Bengtsen, Rikke T. N*ørgård. 2014 Conference.*

An unusual and counter-intuitive metaphor in a title is always an attention-grabber. It is an approach quite often used in networked learning contexts to signal a challenge to the current ways of doing things, particularly ways of talking. Here it is combined with enticing and beautiful images to help underline its points about the need to recognise the weird, the alluring, the terrifying and the mongrel aspects of networked education and help people to find a language that acknowledges this. It has some of the same polemical aims as parody, and it certainly contains many allusions to other cultural practices and texts, but it does not actually parody them to make its case, nor does it need to.

The glow of unwork? Issues of portrayal in networked learning research. Maggi Savin-Baden and Gemma Tombs. 2016 Conference.

'Unwork' is one of those inversions that suggest at least a challenge to contemporary practices and possibly, through parody, an alternative to them. A parody of 'work' might expose the reader to previously unseen aspects of it. Although parody is not directly used, such exposure is definitely the aim. Unwork here refers to invisible work that happens at interfaces, and the paper is concerned with the ways in which the participants in a piece of a research and their findings are portrayed. Like the previous example, it shows a concern for voices that need to be heard. It draws on interesting metaphors associated with space and place and points to many issues of friction and invisibility at boundaries—but it does not need to use parody to do this.

Where have all the students gone? They are all on Facebook Now. Dennis Landgrebe Thomsen, Mia Thyrre Sørensen, Thomas Ryberg 2016 Conference.

Rhetorical questions are a popular device in paper headings, and this one hints at a parody of familiar laments of loss and death that might be seen in examples such as Pete Seeger's folk song 'Where have all the flowers gone?'—a tradition sufficiently long standing to have a Latin name 'ubi sunt'. That might be the 'glancing allusion' that draws us in, but it is not really a parody of such songs, nor even of the current situation. It is instead an excellent title in that it succinctly summarises what it says—the answer to the question is there in the title. It is to be taken literally. The title and paper point to a contemporary problem—and the familiar, not really academic, site of the answer (Facebook) suggests that any parodic contribution might be of the conservative rather than the subversive kind (Dentith 2000: 9)—that is, it would attempt to draw attention to a new practice that is veering too far from the norm or tradition. Dentith highlights this normative or corrective function of parody in a way that is not so apparent in Bakhtin's work. We can, though, achieve this without parody.

Making digital compost: place-responsive pedagogy at a distance. Sharon Boyd. 2018 Conference.

This was a stand-out title in the 2018 conference, where the majority of titles were fairly literal. Compost is a metaphor that has the capacity to attract and amuse, with its association with waste products. But the appeal is not merely scatological; current ecological concerns predispose us to welcome the nourishing environment and renewed growth that compost offers. Compost might make us laugh, but equally it might offer us some hope. The use in the actual paper provides a valuable introduction to Haraway's (2016) idea that posthuman(ism) should be replaced by 'compost'. Boyd's main message is about the importance of emotional associations with environment and place for distance students. However, it is not a parodying paper and it is not using the idea of compost to make any polemical allusions.

This exploration of headings and topics suggests that a tendency to use playful language and ideas in writing about networked learning—at least in titles—is tempered with a careful unfolding of serious points, expressed in literal terms, especially in relation to papers intended for the public gaze, and a global public at that. It might be argued that there is no place in academic writing for parody; it is a serious business. It is also perhaps not up to us to parody ourselves in our academic papers; however, in our teaching practices and research interests, we are certainly up for the kinds of development and renewal that are associated with parody. Although my cherry-picking of networked learning titles has not given me much to say about the role of parody for our community, it has identified some related themes to weave into my argument: boundary crossing, renewal, allusions to other texts, use of metaphor and media and—present in all of the examples—new ways of doing, being and expressing 'voice' in education, all of which would be compatible with Bakhtin's dialogism.

But the analysis also shows the need to go beyond titles. I was aware that there had been laughter and decided to look at what happens during events. A closer examination of an event that took place at the 2014 conference, under the seemingly

innocuous title of 'Actor-Network Theory Double-Symposium', indicates that the spirit of parody is alive and well in networked learning conferences.

Actor-Network Theory Double-Symposium. Steve Wright, enrolled members of the ANT Facebook Group.

The symposium itself had some unexpected elements, while preserving—with transgressions—the genre of a conference symposium. Indeed, it even invoked the older form of the ancient Greek symposium, an ironic use of tradition to subvert the status quo. The Symposium Introduction shows some of the workings of what was planned, speaking directly to potential participants at the conference. It contains an explanation of its own breach of the template instructions for submitting a proposal to the conference. It exposes how agency is lost through such templates. It sets out what was to happen in the symposium, including talking, thinking and drinking (as happened in ancient Greece)—with a beer tasting, which was also used to demonstrate other practices associated with actor-network theory (ANT). The media, modes and materiality to be used indicate an intention to practise and enact phenomena and theories being considered—actor-network theory, communities of practice and cultural historical activity theory. Or as Steve put it succinctly: 'to speak truth to acronyms by representing this as an ANT having a CHAT with a COP'.

The laughter generated did not destroy the templates, theoretical perspectives, invisible rules of the conference and ways of writing about networked learning, but it did expose and challenge them. The combined parody of academic and ancient Greek symposia—including the material engagement often missing from papers *about* material engagement—provided an alternative approach that made us question what we do. I was not present at the symposium myself as I was an organiser; however, the list of requirements for the symposium sent in advance of the conference certainly gave me plenty to think about and challenged one or two 'accepted' ways of doing things in conference venues.

The parody in this final example is reminiscent of Bakhtin's exploration of laughter and parody (and indeed satire, travesty and burlesque) in the medieval carnival, particularly as portrayed by Rabelais (Bakhtin 1984b). Parody of official and religious orthodoxy through the language of the marketplace and folk humour provides a safe opportunity for disempowered people to vent opposition to authority and laugh at themselves in the process, but still challenge the status quo and leave the way open to renewal. For Bakhtin, 'Carnival existed not as a form of agency but as a reminder that agency was possible' (Renfrew 2015: 135). Actor-network theory provides another such reminder; so does the carnivalistic way it was enacted at the 2014 conference.

I am not suggesting that networked learning conferences are authoritarian or orthodox in organisation (though, having been involved in such organisation, I would understand if they were!). They certainly seem less so than some other educational conferences. However, well-established practices inevitably set up tensions, contradictions and constraints that people might want to challenge, especially if they are interested in doing something new. At the 2018 conference, at least according to some of the Twitterfeed, it seemed that participants relished the reminders—not only of past papers and symposia but also of the ways in which the community

operates and the opportunities to influence this. This impression was supported by the paper that now forms Chap. 1 of this book (Hodgson and McConnell 2018). Thus both the first and this last chapter of the book highlight that some participants particularly value the conference's opportunities to promote new thinking and new modes of participation.

11.5 Where Is the Novel in Networked Learning?

11.5.1 My Parody: Come Up with a Novel Metaphor

The reuse of tropes from other genres, lively metaphors and neologisms that suggest inversion or subversion are all present in the texts I identified above as well as in the symposium. Novel metaphors also appeared in 2018; as well as digital compost, there was 'architectural silence' (McMordie 2018) as a metaphor explaining the lack of managerialism in networked learning. There was novel use of metaphor in a 'multi-metaphorical framework' (Liashenko 2018) and neologisms such as 'mobilage' (Johnson 2018)—a portmanteau word for mobilities and bricolage. In this book too there are digital habitats, dashboards and boundary objects to name but a few, all recent or novel metaphors. But my own novel metaphor is the novel—and I only discovered this by playing with words (which shows how useful attempting to parody can be).

I had anticipated some novelty in approach to networked learning topics in my parody of a paper, and that led to my question about 'the novel' in the subtitle above. There is an ambiguity in this word—one that allows me to suggest 'the novel' (in its literary sense) as a possible metaphor or analogy for networked learning. There is potentially a strong resonance for networked learning with what Bakhtin has to say about the novel. As I work through the argument to this end, I draw on an example from 2018 (and this book) to support my case. There is a debate to be had about this analogy with the novel—it is by no means conclusive.

The first thing Bakhtin has to say about the novel is that there is a close association with parody:

> …it [the novel] is the archetype of what Bakhtin calls 'carnivalized literature'. Carnivalized literature takes from medieval carnival the inversion of power structures, the parodic debunking of all that a particular society takes seriously (including and in particular all that which it fears). (Morris 1994: 250 Glossary)

While no obvious parodic debunking tends to happen in networked learning conference papers (until now), Bakhtin himself says something else about the novel that highlights its importance for him and that sounds remarkably like some of the work that is being done by networked learning authors, though they generally seem to do it without parody in the form of polemic imitation.

> The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them. (Bakhtin 1981b: 5)

By repurposing Bourdieu's habitus as disposition, Michael Gallagher (Chap. 3) is surely incorporating, re-formulating and re-accentuating. He is also exposing conventionality of educational theory and practice by putting 'a human and familiar face' to it, albeit an imagined one. I am not certain that he is parodying; however, his work shares some features, and he is certainly using some related novelistic devices. But I think his intention is to illustrate rather than to make polemic allusion.

Parody usually depends on 'double-voiced' discourse, described at the start of this chapter. This means that the reader or listener experiences both what the original person and the parodist have to say, simultaneously. Usually the original voice retains its power, but the important factor is that the other voice is still heard. A major influence on Bakhtin's extended account of the dialogic was the work of Dostoevsky, because this was seen to permit multiple voices, as opposed to expressing a single authorial voice. The author is capable not only of hearing his hero but of answering him as well (Bakhtin 1984a). And Gallagher is doing this too with his imagined character, Amira. He knows enough about his composite character to comment on her experiences and their implications; his claims are not about the fictional character but rather about the practices she encounters. Although Gallagher is not attempting to provoke laughter—joyful, derisive or merely in recognition—he is taking similar risks to parodists in using fiction to make an academic point. He is certainly pushing at the boundaries of conventional forms, which is in the spirit of the networked learning phenomenon, if not, generally, its conference papers.

After categorising Dostoevsky as a unique writer, Bakhtin ironically went on in an essay entitled 'Discourse in the Novel' (Bakhtin 1981a) to create a unifying theoretical perspective both about the genre of the novel itself and the dialogical nature of all communication. As Renfrew observes, he quickly 'moves to universalize what he initially attributes to Dostoevsky' (Renfrew 2015: 79). Bakhtin's enthusiasm for the novel because it is not subject to closure as a genre (and therefore less amenable to parody) was expressed in his essay 'Epic and Novel':

> The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it. (Bakhtin 1981b: 7, originally written in 1941)

Decades later, we can be tempted to say the same about networked learning as a phenomenon of educational development. It too attempts to capture the multivoiced nature of contemporary communication. Authors who recognise this quality (e.g. Wegerif 2013) can build on Bakhtin's attention to 'unbounded' dialogic space. But if the analogy holds, then it may offer an explanation of little or no parodying of networked learning forms.

This word 'unbounded' may seem at odds with the boundary work I identified as my next target, but it turns out that it is not.

11.6 Crossing the Boundary into Satire and Travesty

11.6.1 My Parody: Share Examples of Boundary Crossing

I particularly associate networked learning papers with challenging boundaries: the book of the 2014 conference is entitled *Research, Boundaries and Policy in Networked Learning*, but boundaries recur frequently, including in this volume, especially in the work of Riis and Dirckinck-Holmfeld (Chap. 10). For Bakhtin, the novel differs from the epic (for example) as the latter genre is complete and closed. It is part of the definition of the epic that it is in the past and this boundary is impenetrable. Laughter aimed at the epic turns it into another genre—for example, satire. The novel can run up against boundaries but these are shifting and the novel can record those shifts as well as create them through appropriation and repurposing. Understanding what is going on at boundaries and using that knowledge to good effect is as key to Bakhtin's notion of the novel as it is to networked learning authors.

I found in writing this paper that attention to boundaries of the definition of parody was helpful in thinking about what might be bounded and what might not and how. At the start of the paper, I categorised Professor Fuller's comments about 'MOOCs and that kind of thing' as travesty rather than parody. Current uses of the word 'travesty' imply an attempt to reduce or diminish especially through a deliberately inadequate representation. There is a suggestion in Fuller's humour that the traditional will be swept away with thoughtless implementation of 'the latest thing'—a discourse familiar in discussions of MOOCs. There has probably been more written to deprecate the hype associated with MOOCs than there has about MOOCs' actual potential. If the MOOC has been trying to be a serious contender to be the main representation of networked learning, most people in networked learning circles would agree that this is not going to happen. But it is difficult to have a conversation about networked learning with this assumption as a starting point. Similarly, comments from colleagues who categorise themselves as luddites or traditionalists before going on to denigrate networked learning as 'whizzy' or superficial can be difficult to deal with precisely because the speaker 'doesn't get it'. Travesty can be dangerous because its reductive approach renders invisible some of the key values of the target, leaving nothing to talk about.

Satire is perhaps even more dangerous because it involves personal attacks, using parody to do so. Bakhtin saw satire as one of the precursors of the novel because it attacked the established literary and cultural conventions. Like parody, with which it is closely associated sometimes to the point of synonym, satire has developed over time and is widely used today with political and celebrity targets. When satire is very strong, it can displace its original; we no longer recognise the satirised targets of 'Don Quixote' which is often identified as the first modern novel, written in 1605. In our own time, satire about current events is in danger of becoming conflated with 'fake news', though as Cooke (2017)

points out, this is not a new phenomenon. In a study of metacoverage of satirical reporting, Brewer et al. (2013) draw attention to the need to recognise the intertextuality of accounts of political humour, its targets and fake news. Writing about how we satirise events can itself contribute to how those events are perceived, by drawing further attention to them. An extra layer is added to the double voicing, possibly reinforcing approval for the very practice that is supposed to be the target of derision. This may provide a reason for steering clear of such forms of cultural practice (which are often seen as debased). However, Brewer et al. (2013) suggest that intertextuality does increase personal efficacy with respect to knowledge of the news, which may support a case for talking more about satire and parody.

Thus parody might be a tool used mercilessly in relation to other genres. However, an important observation about parody is that 'we cannot decide in advance on the cultural politics of parody' (Dentith 2000: 186), so we cannot easily adopt it as a tool in a repertoire of cultural practice. We do not know how it will work in any given context—whether it is going to challenge authority, limit the excesses of new ideas or expose flaws in our current practices, or just simply let us laugh at ourselves and others. If the parallel with the novel can hold, then networked learning might indeed be dangerous to some traditional forms (or genres) of education. In re-formulating or re-accentuating them—we might add even add 'hacking' to this—we are going to create some disturbance. It is no wonder that we are interested in what happens at boundaries and how they are crossed—they are risky but fascinating places. However, if we accept that like the novel, networked learning is a genre that is 'born of this new world', it may not (yet) be itself subject to such displacement.

However, perhaps the persistent lack of parody, satire and laughter in our writing suggests that the parallels with Bakhtin's notion of the novel do not hold. We can cross boundaries and explore boundary objects without laughter; we can be dialogic without blatant parody. We may use parodic allusion in the titles of our papers and actual parody in our networked learning practices, but maybe we need to stick to the tried and tested forms of academic writing to give ourselves a safe haven. (I think we should be questioning this as a conclusion.)

11.7 Genre, Intertextuality and Multimodality

11.7.1 My Parody: Summarise in Three Categories

Finding three dimensions to capture one's findings, such as boundedness, familiarity of technologies and production (see Chap. 9), is a sensible way of proceeding. It makes the findings manageable for the writer, it is easy on the reader, and it avoids awkward binaries.

The ‘rule of three’ is a well-known rhetorical device in academic writing and public presentation in general—it is an easy target for imitation. Again, this means it is not unique to networked learning. The three themes in the subheading above seemed likely to belong both to networked learning and to a broader account of dialogism, so my ‘summary’ here is of the potential interrelationships between my theoretical framework and my theme of parody. My brief selection from the literature certainly highlighted intertextuality and multimodality. Genre and intertextuality have just been identified as significant for development in writing and other communicative practices, though both of these words may be problematic (Duff 2002). The notion of ‘genre’—a form limited by style and convention—might be troubled by exactly the kind of borders and boundaries that are open to resistance.

As might be expected, a combined Internet search for ‘networked learning’ and ‘intertextuality’ reveals far more examples than a similar search with parody. Networked learning may not need parody in order to recognise and exploit the nature of intertextuality; its texts can rely not only on explicit and implicit allusions and use of genre and referencing conventions, but also on its preoccupation with the flow of knowledge across boundaries. Writers in networked learning are well able to imitate, but do not need the laughter that accompanies imitation in parody. Parody—at least, in response to a quick search—seems not to be present in standard academic papers in networked learning and its contributing fields.

Even where I did find parody, the academic texts associated with the symposium were not written as parodies but in the recognisable genre of academic writing. Its introduction, where parody is in evidence, is a different kind of text from an academic one. The main difference with the symposium was in the range of practices involved, which were intensely multimodal as well as material. Multimodality intuitively feels as though it is not only opening up our academic communication practices, but also the potential for parody. Some reflection on this leads me to wonder whether there may be a connection between low levels of parody and fear of plagiarism. Academic texts have developed rigid conventions, including those that support prevention of plagiarism; some forms of intertexuality, including parody, run the risk of accusations of plagiarism. Although accusations do arise with multimodal forms (especially music), it is perhaps less foregrounded than it is in writing. This topic is beyond the scope of the current paper, though related to it, and is worthy of investigation.

For now, the main point is that multimodality is how networked learning augments texts and, occasionally, engages in parody. But this is networked learning as a phenomenon and not networked learning as a field of academic writing. Parody, and other experimental forms of writing, such as Gallagher’s use of a composite character in Chap. 3, run the risk of rejection by the academic community on the basis that they use something that is not demonstrably ‘the truth’ nor conforming to the ‘scientific method’. Yet truths may be exposed through a variety of methods, media and genres, including fiction and parody.

11.8 Pre-Parodic Networked Learning

11.8.1 My Parody: Use/Create Expressions with Post(-) as a Prefix

I thought it appropriate in my parody to allude to our tendency to use the prefix post (postmodern, posthuman, postdigital, etc.). At the 2018 conference, only two titles contained a post (posthuman and postdigital)—so this was not as well targeted as my dig at the colon.

In planning the paper, it seemed that by this stage I would want to say something about the current status of networked learning and how to make it more recognisable so that it can be parodied, so I inverted this prefix to create 'pre-parodic'. It is perhaps becoming obvious that I now see the pre-parodic state as a blessing and also wonder whether it could be posed as an inevitability in the light of my Bakhtinian perspective that encourages me to draw parallels with the novel. I think this is open for discussion; I have not yet identified any reason to claim that networked learning falls into this category any more than any other academic field. Indeed, when I eventually saw the full paper that now forms Chap. 1 of this book, I noted that Hodgson and McConnell (Hodgson and McConnell 2018) were careful to point out that networked learning is not a discipline, but rather a knowledge community and probably interdisciplinary. This, rather than its unique novelistic qualities, is perhaps a better explanation of why it is resistant to being a producer or the object of parody.

However, my analysis has highlighted the fact that the academic paper or book chapter continues to be the main form of currency in networked learning. Intertextuality in these forms of writing comes via the academic reference. Academic papers, including this one, are heavy with citations and the complex academic expressions derived from them. Perhaps networked learning as a movement might in future be associated with whatever replaces current forms of academic writing rather than with the closed and completed forms belonging to the 'Gutenberg parenthesis' (Pettit 2012). This view of the print era suggests that authoritative and monologic accounts as bounded forms have interrupted a naturally open and unbounded dialogic approach to human communication. While we are likely to incorporate some features of the past 500 years into what is ahead, there are undoubtedly newer forms of writing around (Fitzpatrick 2011). We may need to prepare ourselves for this—and even think of ourselves as potential pioneers in risky forms of academic writing.

Indeed, I reflected that I really ought to be practising what I was suggesting and find some new and parodic modes of expression for making my presentation and perhaps promoting dialogue. But paper and PowerPoint won out—the familiar approaches are after all so much easier to manage. As it was, I had to write the paper in little slivers of time available first thing in the morning—a familiar plight for all people working in higher education. Networked learning forms of writing possibly need to remain pre-parodic until we have more time and feel ready to take the risks.

11.9 What Makes Networked Learning the New Traditional?

11.9.1 My Parody: Set the Study Up as an Alternative to Tradition

The parody seems to have turned into self-parody. Far from establishing networked learning as the new traditional, my analysis suggested it as the new 'novel', which I am now taking pains to rein back. The 'new' is what everyone is perhaps seeking in their networked learning writing; there is a wish to challenge established genres of education, including online education. We do not need to parody these, just to critique them and seek boundaries to cross and dismantle. Yet some of the new alternatives of networked learning genres—of writing, theory or practice—might aspire to be part of the 'canon' for networked learning and even to displace other forms. The 'paradigm wrestling matches' that I noticed in my reflections on networked learning might suggest that renewal is happening anyway.

> Parodic stylizations of canonized genres and styles occupy an essential place in the novel.…
>
> But it is characteristic that the novel does not permit any of these various individual manifestations of itself to stabilize. (Bakhtin 1981b: 6)

There is perhaps a hint of that lack of stabilisation with some networked learning trends and practices. Just as Dickens', or even Dostoevsky's, work does not provide a blueprint for the novel, we are not going to be able to establish the genre of networked learning through or in response to parody. In a delayed riposte to Professor Fuller, the MOOC—in any of its canonised forms of certain approaches to education—is not going to 'be' networked learning. The expression 'the novel does not permit' is not about authoritarianism of fixed genre but is about the potential of unlimited genres. Similarly, networked learning cannot be easily imitated and belittled in its entirety, but emerges instead as 'an unbounded dialogic space' (Wegerif 2013: 49) (although of course it does still involve a lot of attention to boundaries).

11.10 Inconclusion: Unbounded Territory

The final heading is a parody of my whole approach—like other networked learning writers, I want to draw attention to the problem of conventional structures and boundaries. 'Inconclusion' is not a word—it is a signal that conclusions are sometimes inappropriate.

I have not succeeded in parodying networked learning—my parody has in the end been mainly of academic writing in the social sciences. When called on by reviewers to suggest what might be a parody of networked learning, I am unable to come up with anything. Instead, I have highlighted how wedded we are to academic writing conventions and suggested some explanations for us not wanting to

change this. I have also suggested an analogy between networked learning and the novel which might provide a more interesting explanation for our not being subject to parody.

My attempt at parody also proposes that parody is not currently needed in networked learning, even though the suggestion that it could happen did generate discussion and laughter at the 2018 conference. This does not mean we can avoid being parodied at some stage, and we will need to be aware of the direction of the laughter. We would also want to know how the laughter is mediated: might algorithms be involved, for example, with the results presented on a dashboard, as described in Chap. 4? And if we do decide to parody other genres ourselves, we need to be aware of the possible consequences. If laughter does not accompany our attempts, we might be accused of travesty, plagiarism or worse.

Even though there are hints in this chapter that we might want to extend our writing repertoire, there is nothing inherently wrong with our current forms of academic writing. We should perhaps hope that if we do have to be subject to parody, it will come in the form of 'homage' rather than travesty. A parody of networked learning could be a tribute to it. I hope that readers will recognise my own intention as being an example of this.

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