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## INTRODUCTION

# Social and Cultural Studies of New Literacies from an Educational Perspective

COLIN LANKSHEAR & MICHELE KNOBEL

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This volume aims to provide a Reader—in the sense of a general introduction and overview—for a field of inquiry we think of as social and cultural studies of new literacies from the perspective of an interest in education. Its publication coincides with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a symposium published in *The English and Media Magazine* titled “Towards new literacies, information technology, English and media education” (1993) and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the New Literacies book series being launched by Peter Lang Publishing (USA).

## New Literacies: Early Statements

Throughout the 1990s talk of new literacies remained quite marginal as a formal academic concept, at a time when terms like “digital literacy,” “computer literacy,” and “information literacy” were more prominent as names for reading and writing mediated by digital technologies—particularly in published work. In everyday conversation among education academics, “new literacies” seemed mainly to serve as a convenient shorthand for recognizing that new “species” of written language were emerging in daily life with the increasing uptake of myriad software applications and mobile and online communication services and practices.

### *A Starting Point*

There were significant exceptions, however. In 1993, David Buckingham, in collaboration with Chris Abbott and Julian Sefton-Green, made the first formal recognition we can find within professional literature of “new literacies” as a potentially viable construct for organizing ongoing theoretical, conceptual, and pedagogical work across diverse cultural sites including formal education. In a series of articles addressing the theme “Towards New Literacies,” Buckingham, Abbott, and Sefton-Green dis-

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cussed aspects of video gaming, the role of information technology within English teaching (e.g., word processing, notebook computers and CD-ROMs), hypertext, and the implications of digital multimedia for media education, from the broad perspective of culture and communication.

Individually and collectively the authors approached new literacies more as a thematic frame for addressing issues arising in public debate at the time than as a concept to be closely defined, and explicitly rejected any sharp division between old and new technologies. They recognized that a key lesson to be taken from the history of print literacy is that “the ways new technologies are developed and used depend very much upon existing practices” (Buckingham, 1993, p. 20). At the same time, however, they were responding to the fact that public debates around the rapid uptake of digital technologies at the time largely framed technologies in terms of established and emerging technologies positioned in opposition to each other: computers were widely perceived as threats to print literacy, and video games were often seen as leisure pursuits that could lead to addiction, rather than contribute to human improvement in the manner of many established leisure pursuits. From the perspective of Buckingham and his colleagues, the familiar frame of the debate needed to be contested and revised.

Buckingham argues that it can never be proved one way or the other whether video games encourage violence. Moreover, focusing on this question is counterproductive: it actually undermines our capacity to understand violence as a phenomenon, by isolating it from other social forces involved in constituting violent behavior (Buckingham, 1993, p. 22). For parallel reasons, it can never be proved one way or the other whether computers have deleterious effects on print literacy.

By contrast, however, it *is* possible—indeed, it is *fruitful*—to focus on certain trends and tendencies that can be understood in terms of continuity, evolution, and incremental change. For example, as Buckingham argues (1993, p. 25), it is possible to detect “a blurring of boundaries between texts and between media” in cases like computer games that invoke “trans-media intertextuality.” It is possible to discern a blurring of conventional distinctions between readers and writers, and producers and consumers, contingent upon the take up of new production technologies. In such cases, “new” is not understood in juxtaposition to “old” but, rather, in terms of continuities that result in evolution over time. “New” can serve as a provisional or heuristic reference point or vantage spot from which to conceive, explore, and understand phenomena in process.

The appropriate stance to adopt is one that enables us to improve our concepts about and theories of what is going on around us, such that we can make expansive and fruitful responses to the conditions we encounter. In the case of Buckingham, Abbott, and Sefton-Green, adopting the term “new literacies” offered a way to make creative and constructive responses to debates they were observing at the time—debates that have continued, and in some cases intensified, during the past 20 years. Ultimately, argues Buckingham (1993, p. 20), the debates around literacy and new technologies that impute causes and effects, that polarize opinion, and that limit our capacity to understand important aspects of our world, “point to the need for *a new definition of literacy*”: a definition “that is not tied to particular technologies or practices” but, rather, “that allows us to look at the competencies that are developed across the whole range of culture and communication” (Buckingham, 1993, p. 20, our emphasis).

### *“New Literacies” and a New Technologies Emphasis*

Nearer the end of the 1990s it was more common to find literacy researchers and writers using “new literacies” to formally mark an increasing awareness of the scope and role of post typographic texts in everyday life, and their significance for greater educational attention. For most, “new literacies” referred to reading and writing texts mediated by digital electronic technologies. Writing within the



context of his professional interest in second language/foreign language/English as a second language acquisition, Mark Warschauer (1998) co-identified new literacies and electronic literacies, asking “what new literacies does multimedia technology demand?” He referred to learning to compose electronic mail and making effective use of the World Wide Web as typical examples of new literacies that have a role in language acquisition and beyond (p. 758). Anticipating issues of equity and critical perspective raised by other theorists to be surveyed below, Warschauer urged theorists and researchers to move beyond determinist and instrumental conceptions of new literacies and, instead, to take up a socially and culturally informed approach that can address in rich and deep ways questions about how development of new literacies intersect with race, class, gender, and equity issues; how learning and practicing electronic literacies are affected by the social and cultural contexts of institutions and communities, and what new literacies are demanded—within and beyond schools and classrooms—by multimedia computer technology (1998, p. 759).

In his inaugural “Technology” column for the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Education*, titled “New Literacies,” Bertram (Chip) Bruce (1998) describes the column’s purpose as providing a venue for exploring new communications and information technologies and what they mean for literacy. He speaks of “rapidly evolving literacy practices”—new literacies—within the context of the “hypertextual, multimedia world we are entering” (p. 46), and identifies the challenge of understanding the “yet to be designed world” that unfolds as people engage in new practices made possible by new technologies (p. 47).

In a similar vein, Donald Leu Jr. (2000, pp. 423–424) identifies “the new literacies of the internet” in terms of the ways in which and the ends for which people read and write within networked information and communications technologies. These new literacies, says Leu, are constantly emerging and evolving as internet technologies themselves evolve, in accordance with the principle that literacies in any age change alongside changes in technologies for literacy. Leu (2001, p. 568) takes the example of literacy in contemporary work life to illustrate the stakes for education in coming to terms with the new technologies of the internet. He argues that members of modern organizations must know how to accomplish certain key tasks rapidly. They must be able to (1) identify key problems and issues for their work unit; (2) access relevant information and evaluate it critically; (3) use this information to address the issue or problem; and (4) communicate the solution throughout the organization as appropriate. On the assumption that at least part of what schools should be doing effectively is contributing to the development of future workers who can perform well, Leu poses the question of how educators can prepare students within networked classrooms for “the increasingly collaborative, problem-oriented, and critical nature of literacy” (pp. 568–69).

### *“New Literacies” through a Wider Lens: Beyond a Focus on New Technologies Alone*

Other authors, particularly researchers and writers with interests in media education and cultural studies, associated new literacies with a range of post-typographic texts and technologies that included, but also went beyond, a focus on new digital-electronic media alone.

Carmen Luke (2000, p. 424), for example, talks of new literacies in relation to “a changing information, social, and cultural environment” that renders inadequate “book- and print-based literacies” and school learning approaches based solely on book culture. Within this context, new approaches to preparing teachers become necessary. Luke discusses an intervention in the teacher education program at her university intended to better prepare teachers for addressing the demands of new literacies. While far-reaching changes in everyday communication interactions and practices associated with



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electronic media provided the immediate catalyst for developing the program she discusses, the concepts and theory informing the program reflect phenomena and insights integral to issues, priorities, and practices within media studies and cultural studies dating from at least the 1960s. These include a concern with deconstructing media texts and representations via print and imagery within such media as “popular magazines, TV programs and advertising, and related forms of media representations,” together with understanding “the social uptake” of such texts (2000, p. 425). Building a new literacies perspective into teacher education, for Luke, involves finding ways to “blend and synthesize” conventional and new technologies, and to inform computer education/literacy with insights and questions from media and cultural inquiry—such as by applying “tools of media analysis to Internet information” (2000, p. 426).

In “New technologies/new literacies: Reconstructing education for the new millennium,” Douglas Kellner (2001) presents a similar and overlapping perspective to Luke’s. Kellner observes that in modern societies the rapid introduction and uptake of new digital-electronic technologies has occurred alongside large-scale demographic and multicultural change resulting from intense migration. These forces in tandem present pressing challenges to the ideal of progress toward more democratic and egalitarian societies. In the interests of such progress, Kellner seeks ways that new technologies and new literacies can be developed and taken up such that they provide effective learning tools that can help realize democratic and egalitarian ends, rather than further benefiting already privileged groups and individuals in terms of social power and cultural capital (pp. 68–69).

By “new literacies,” Kellner means new ways of using socially constructed forms of communication and representation. As with the position argued by Carmen Luke, Kellner’s conception of the kinds of new literacies we need to develop builds strongly on ideas, techniques, and values integral to media literacy and critical practice forged since the 1960s. The explosion in new media increases the relevance of critical media practices and critical forms of reading and writing, along with analytic and interpretive techniques and procedures that have been developed within areas like semiotics, social semiotics, narrative analysis, and textual deconstruction, and projects their further development into spaces of intensifying engagement with electronic multimedia. Kellner argues that the current technological revolution “brings to the fore more than ever the role of media like television, popular music, films and advertising,” since these are absorbed by the internet and become integral to “new cyberspaces and forms of culture and pedagogy” (2001, p. 70). The emphasis upon and approaches to interpretation and evaluation found in traditional media literacy becomes still more urgent under current conditions of technical and cultural change, since media culture is profoundly pedagogical. It socializes participants into taking up values, identities, and ways of experiencing and perceiving the world.

For Kellner as much as for Luke, just as the conditions of new media up the ante for media literacy and call for its further development in the interests of progressive social, political, and ethical ideals, so they also call for developing expansive conceptions of and approaches to computer literacy. Far beyond technical know-how and the ability to access, process, and generate content using typical computing applications, computer literacy calls for “heightened capacities for critically accessing, analyzing, interpreting, processing, and storing both print-based and multimedia material” and sophisticated visual literacy competence (Kellner, 2001, pp. 73–74).

The extent to which the link between new literacies and digital-electronic technologies is regarded as contingent—albeit strong—rather than necessary is argued in different but complementary ways by Ladislaus Semali (2001) and Brian Street (1998).

Semali defines new literacies as literacies that have emerged in the post-typographic era of intensified visual and electronic communication involving epistemological and cultural changes in the ways





information is “designed, communicated and retrieved” (2001, no page). As interaction with “texts” has moved increasingly from engagement with print-dominated toward intensified multimodal content, traditional assumptions about what it means to read and write and how meanings are communicated have been disrupted and displaced. Semali refers to theorists who associate the rise of post-typographic modes of information and communication with a shift from modern to postmodern conceptions and practices of meaning and meaning-making. Where modernist meaning based on the model of the book as the default text type assumed linearity, logical progression, singularity and symmetry, postmodern meaning tends toward the non-linear, is multiple and hybrid, often communicated by means of disjuncture and asymmetrical means, may be fleeting, unstable, more impressionistic and intuitive.

Communicating and negotiating postmodern meaning mediated by post-typographic modes of inscription is intensified by digital-electronic technologies, but in no way depends upon them. For Semali, television literacy, visual literacy and media literacy—all predating the explosion in digital-electronic technologies—are new literacies alongside information literacy associated with electronic databases and the World Wide Web and computer literacy. Furthermore, echoing values and priorities expressed by the other authors we have referred to above, Semali emphasizes the importance of a critical and politicized dimension to new literacies, whereby examining how particular media texts generate meanings goes beyond “the aesthetics, modes and forms present” in visual and multimodal texts to also “locate them in their social and political contexts” (2001, no page). He asks how the “new languages of media” might enable us to generate and circulate meanings that enhance lives and reject oppression.

In “New literacies in theory and practice: What are the implications for education?,” Brian Street (1998) presents three examples of texts typical of the kinds that mediate new literacies in the sense he intends. Two of these are hard copy hybrids of words, images and symbols (published on card or paper). The third example involves the creative appropriation within certain youth subcultures of sign and sound sequences on electronic pagers or beepers for passing idiosyncratic messages to one another, using the technologies in ways not intended by their designers and manufacturers. For Street, what makes the kinds of literacy practices that are mediated and constituted by such texts “new” is partly that they depart from the conventional identification of literacy with written speech governed by traditional views of grammar, lexicon and semantics. They mobilize a much “wider range of semiotic systems that cut across reading, writing and speech” (1998, p. 9). Traditional or conventional literacy comprises but one part of communicative competence. Street argues that within the “new communicative order” of the “new media age” (Kress, 2003) and an age of rapidly changing and “globalizing” population demographics, and across the multiple domains of everyday life, being literate involves much more than competence with conventional reading and writing and conventional print texts. We must increasingly negotiate meanings within contexts mediated by multimodal texts, and where making meaning successfully is not a matter of mastering abstract formal grammatical conventions but, rather, draws on “grammars” that provide a means for “representing patterns of experience...[and enable] human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them” (Halliday, 1985, p. 101, cited in Street, 1998, p. 10).

Being literate in this sense entails bringing lives and texts together within contexts in ways that “work”: in the sense of successfully negotiating meanings, by managing a grammar/semiosis that brings together a text, one’s experience, and features of the current context in a functional manner (i.e., serves an immediate purpose, helps realize a task, enables effective communication, etc.). Street’s example of a chart designed to help people in South African communities to recognize when a water source is likely to be safe for drinking highlights the kinds of semiotic competence needed to read the text

in ways that will enable sound judgments about water quality: distinguishing logos from symbols relating to relationships between animal life and pollution levels; relating text to degrees of shading, etc. Anyone who, like Street himself initially, reads the dark shading on the chart to mean impurity and light shading to mean purity, would get the chart “wrong.” Similarly, someone not familiar with “pager” or “beeper”-using subcultures could not possibly read “07734” to mean “hello,” since they would not know to turn the screen upside down and make the creative (leet-speak like) jump from numbers to letters. For Street, the new literacies of the new communicative order invoke myriad “grammars” and forms of insiderliness that bespeak patterns of experience and relationships between texts and experience that wreak havoc with conventional conceptions and norms of literacy grounded in print.

### *New Literacies without New Technologies at All*

We end this brief survey of typical examples of conceptions of new literacies from the early life of the term within educational theory and research with an interesting outlier: the kind of case that has influenced our own approach to thinking about new literacies during the past decade. In “Culturally responsive instruction as a dimension of new literacies,” Kathryn Au (2001, no page) associates new literacies with pedagogical interventions designed to help students from diverse backgrounds attain high literacy levels by “promoting engagement through activities that reflect the values, knowledge, and structures of interaction that students bring from the home.” She claims that developing forms of culturally responsive instruction may create within classrooms *new* literacies that connect to home backgrounds.

Au argues that in the context of education policies that may narrow the literacy curriculum—such as by seeking to raise measured literacy performance levels in standardized tests—opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to develop higher order skills through interaction with texts may be diminished. Resisting such a trend calls for creative attempts to bring student backgrounds to bear on literacy education by building bridges between cultural ways and strengths and engagement with texts in class. Au reports some of the ways teachers involved in culturally responsive instruction do this. For example, in a “talk story” approach, teachers participate in reading lessons in ways that resemble a familiar Hawaiian community speech event. In “talk story-like reading lessons” learners do not wait for the teacher to call on them but speak when they have something to say, and formulate answers to questions in a collaborative manner, “speaking in rhythmic alternation with a great deal of overlapping speech” (2001, no page). Such “hybrid events,” says Au, incorporate features of community and school. They generate “literate activities” that are similar to those of school and community respectively, but are not identical to either (Au, 2001, no page). The talk story hybrid activity comprises “teacher-guided discussion of literature following talk story-like participation structures.” Such discussions constitute “a new literacy that makes connections to students’ home culture” (Au, 2001, no page).

The range of new literacies identified by Au emphasizes the normative association between “new” literacies and the pursuit of educational ideals, in a way that resonates with some of Kellner’s arguments. Unlike the cases discussed by Kellner, however, Au’s examples have no necessary link to post-typographic texts and technologies, far less to the use of digital-electronic technologies.

## Adopting a Focus on New Literacies

The kinds of ideas surveyed above influenced our own thinking and activity. Until the late 1990s we had thought of “new literacies” as a convenient shorthand for changes in literacy practices associated

with larger changes going on in the world. Influenced by our own experiences of researching diverse literacy practices within a variety of formal educational, community, and domestic settings from a broadly sociocultural perspective, and noting deep qualitative differences often apparent between young people's activities within formal educational settings and elsewhere, we became increasingly interested in rhetorical, theoretical, and practical-pragmatic means for naming these differences, pointing to patterns between and across different settings, and mounting critiques of formal educational literacy business as usual. The idea of new literacies, with some of the connotations attaching to "new," struck a chord with such purposes, and we adopted "new literacies" as a focus for our subsequent work as literacy researchers and writers. Since 2000 this has involved us in three related tasks:

- (a) Thinking about "new literacies" conceptually and theoretically
- (b) Mapping some dimensions of a new literacies research space
- (c) Conceiving and editing a book series on new literacies

### *(a) Thinking about "New Literacies" Conceptually and Theoretically*

For us, the challenge expressed by Bruce in his inaugural "Technology" column referred to earlier, needed to be taken seriously. Bruce says:

We find ourselves engaging in new practices made possible by the new technologies. These new ways of communicating, or relating to one another, and of accomplishing our daily lives create possibilities that go beyond what even the designers of the new technologies envisage. It is this yet to be designed world that we seek to understand. (1998, p. 47)

Pursuing such understanding seemed to us a pre-eminent task for literacy researchers and literacy educators. An invitation to participate in an international working seminar convened by James Gee at the University of Wisconsin-Madison provided us with an opportunity to think in a more focused way about new literacies. The seminar sought to generate elements of a research agenda within the broad area of the New Literacy Studies under conditions of global change. At this seminar we presented a paper called "The New Literacy Studies and the study of new literacies" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2000). It focused on the extent to which work formally identified with the New Literacy Studies had to that time largely bypassed the theme of new literacies.

We adopted the idea that "new literacies" was best understood in terms of practices that were increasingly mediated by new technologies, but not *necessarily* mediated by new technologies. We also distinguished two ways we thought the idea of "new" might usefully apply to work in the area of literacy studies. One was a *paradigmatic* sense: the idea of the New Literacy Studies as a sociocultural paradigm for literacy theory and research that had been developing around the study of literacies as social practices from the time of Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's work in the late 1970s and onwards (Scribner & Cole, 1981; see also Street, 1984; Gee, 1990). The other was what we called an *ontological* sense, where one might plausibly talk about new forms of literacy practices emerging, that could in significant ways be distinguished from previously existing ones. Within this ontological sense of new literacies we included forms of literacy practice that were emerging in association with new technologies, along with others that might or might not involve the use of new technologies. It was the ontological sense of "new literacies" that became the focus of our work, largely undertaken from a New Literacies Studies perspective.



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At the same time, we recognized two things that seemed important to us when thinking about new literacies in relation to education. The first concerned the continuity as well as disruption that occur within literacy practices within contexts of technological change. As Buckingham and others had noted much earlier, the ways new technologies are taken up and used in daily practice are strongly influenced by existing practices. Much of what we had seen in schools reflected the absorption of computers and other digital electronic devices into existing routines and “ways”: established literacies changed only to the extent that they were now sometimes done with word processors rather than pencils.

By contrast, there were many instances of new technologies mediating influential emerging literacy practices that were significantly different in nature, scope and consequences from what had previously existed. For example, blogging was impacting journalism in quite profound ways; mobile devices were impacting cultural practices and communications in the streets, extending to political activism, as well as to gaming, group cultural practices and maintaining relationships. We recognized that if literacy practices in education are to stay in touch with the world beyond the classrooms, educators must become informed about creative disruptions and not merely adapt new technologies to familiar practices and routines. This calls for ongoing work that aims to map and understand such evolutions and project them to educational audiences.

The second thing that seemed important to us from an educational perspective when thinking about new literacies was the existence of influential *contemporary* literacy practices that did not necessarily involve new technologies but, nonetheless, should (in our view) be on educators’ radars. At the time, such “chronologically”—though not “technologically”—new literacies included examples like producing paper-based zines and works of fan fiction, and scripting scenarios within the practice of scenario planning (among many others).

Beginning with “The New Literacy Studies and the study of new literacies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2000, 2003), and continuing through successive editions of our book *New Literacies* (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, 2006, 2011), we have tried to understand new literacies in ways that honor the increased mediating presence of digital-electronic technologies within everyday literacy practices, while maintaining a place for popular and influential literacy practices that do not presuppose new media—always with a view to recommending that educators, education administrators and policy makers, and educational researchers attend to the importance such literacies assume within the everyday lives of students, their families, their networks and their communities.

### (b) Mapping Some Dimensions of a New Literacies Research Space

While wrestling with conceptual and theoretical aspects of new literacies we were also thinking about the kinds of questions discussed at the Wisconsin seminar. We pondered what a sociocultural research agenda for new literacies might involve and look like, and how attempts to generate a critical mass of new literacies research endeavors might be fostered and nurtured. Two specific questions interested us:

- To what extent might investigating new literacies—notably, perhaps, those with substantial online components—call for developing innovative *methodological* and/or *theoretical* approaches and mixes?
- What might be some fruitful options for *research orientations* within the sociocultural study of new literacies?

At the level of theoretical innovation, it was evident that studies of new literacies were encouraging a push into domains of theory substantially new to literacy research. These included an interest in



games studies (see, for example, <http://gamestudies.org>), Actor Network Theory, recent developments within theories of space and time hitherto most commonly associated with fields like geography and architecture (e.g., Appadurai, 1996), “flow theory” (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996), developments in socio-technical studies (e.g., Perkel, 2006), social network theory (e.g., Wellman, 2001), social informatics, and so on. Research in video gaming was generating new twists on concepts and theories of play, design, and learning.

With respect to methodology, researchers were responding to diverse challenges posed by practices emerging around developments in new media and communications. Some (e.g., Jones, 1999; Lemke, 2000; Leander, 2003) addressed issues raised by researching across online and offline environments: for example, how far it would be necessary to develop new methods and techniques to undertake participant observation. Others raised issues about how researchers might get at meanings generated within popular cultural practices involving multimedia text production, and the extent to which text-based analyses need supplementing with field-based inquiry to get at insider meanings (Burn, 2004).

The question about the need for theoretical and methodological innovation within new literacies research is empirical, not *a priori*. The only way it can ultimately be answered is by seeing what plays out in the course of making theoretical and methodological progress within a field. The point is to get on with the work and, as it were, see what shakes down. This relates to our question about fruitful options for research orientations within studies of new literacies.

As educationists interested in new literacies we were aware that researchers in this area often sense an expectation that their research should aim to make some active and more or less direct contribution toward enhancing teaching and learning within formal education settings. While this is a valuable research outcome, we thought it important to acknowledge that the very “newness” of the phenomena under investigation, plus the fact that to a considerable extent the field of literacy studies needs to reinvent itself in order to address the changes going on around us, should caution against adopting unduly goal-directed and functional/applied orientations at the outset. From this perspective, along with “Educationally applicable research,” we considered the potential value of what we thought of as “Let’s see” and “Try on” orientations toward new literacies research.

#### (i) “Let’s see” Research

“Let’s see” research is undertaken largely for its own sake, with the primary aim of understanding in depth a “new” social practice and the literacies associated with or mobilized within this practice. A “let’s see” orientation encourages researchers to get as close as possible to viewing a new practice from the perspectives and sensibilities of “insiders.” The existence of striking differences in mindsets with respect to social practices involving new technologies establishes the value of attending to how “insiders” engage with new literacies on their (i.e., insider) terms (cf. Jenkins, 2006).

#### (ii) “Try on” Research

“Try on” research encourages experimentation with concepts, theory and methodology, including innovative “mash ups” of theories and methods, together with the development of new techniques and modifications of existing techniques for data collection and analysis to explore and understand emerging and changing literacy practices. Such orientations parallel the quest for innovation and willingness to pursue “virtuous circles” (Castells, 1996, p. 67) that have enabled so much recent technological change and its creative appropriation, including those that issue in new literacy practices themselves. As with technological innovation, there are leading edges in research innovation to be encouraged and brought to wider attention and take up.



### (iii) “Educationally applicable” Research

This focuses more directly and self-consciously on pursuing findings that can potentially be applied to better understanding or enabling learning in school and other formal learning spaces or, perhaps, to applying ideas and findings from extant studies to formal learning settings. Typical examples might include: studies addressing the nature, role and efficacy of reviewer feedback in honing young people’s artistic craft or Standard English written narrative expression, which might be trawled for clues about how to mobilize effective features of reviewer feedback for school learning purposes (e.g., Chandler-Olcott & Maher, 2003; Black, 2005); case studies of participants who are working collaboratively with others on projects requiring them to learn through participation; or research on gaming where concepts and principles are identified that can be “interpreted and translated” into possible approaches to creating good learning environments.

### (c) *The “New Literacies” Book Series*

Within the context we have described here, the idea of pursuing a book series made obvious sense as a practical-pragmatic strategy for encouraging and enabling the dissemination of work that could further the conceptual and theoretical development of new literacies and research into new literacies from a broad social and cultural perspective. We believed this should be a series that would be as open and diverse as possible and where there was scope to encourage work that might involve commercial risk but should nonetheless be published on the basis of its quality and significance.

Peter Lang Publishing (USA) agreed to publish a series on “New Literacies” that aimed “to explore some key dimensions of the changes occurring within social practices of literacy and the educational challenges they present, with a view to informing educational practice in helpful ways.” The series would ask: “what are new literacies, how do they impact on life in schools, homes, communities, workplaces, sites of leisure, and other key settings of human cultural engagement, and what significance do new literacies have for how people learn and how they understand and construct knowledge?” It would aim to challenge “established and ‘official’ ways of framing literacy,” and to ask “what it means for literacies to be powerful, effective, and enabling under current and foreseeable conditions.” We hoped that, collectively, the works in the series would help “to reorient literacy debates and literacy education agendas” (Peter Lang USA, 2012).

To date the series has published 45 books and the following chapters have been drawn exclusively from recent contributions to the series’ corpus.

## Organization and Scope of the Book

This book aims to be of interest to a diverse audience comprising teachers and teacher educators, education administrators, curriculum developers, education policy makers, professional development specialists, post graduate research students and other literacy researchers. It is interested in the ways that participating in social practices of new literacies can be seen and understood in terms of people becoming insiders to ways of doing life that are considered desirable or worthwhile. It involves learning how to do things that are worth doing and being in ways that are worth being. The ideal of education in the sense intended here is concerned with processes by which human beings acquire the means and dispositions to live well, to live some version or versions of “good lives.” Education involves learning how to take on identities, be members of groups and communities, take on civic responsibilities,

develop an ethical stance toward other people and the world, and so on. Within societies like our own, schooling/formal education is invested with responsibility for much of this initiation and preparation. At the same time, education is much wider than formal education and, indeed, it is commonplace to hear complaints of formal education failing to do an acceptable job of preparation. Increasingly, we find educationists and others with interests in formal education looking to spaces beyond schools and other formal learning institutions for clues about how we might collectively do a better job of educating.

In terms of its organization and scope, the book is based on the idea of the school as a learning institution that occupies a particular location along a “learning spectrum” of institutional, quasi-institutional, and non-formal spaces. Five such spaces have been identified for the purposes of this collection, and the book is organized in five sections corresponding to these spaces.

### (a) *The Space of the School Classroom*

The opening section focusing on classroom contexts addresses a rich and diverse array of settings, ranging from a formal class within an Alternative to Incarceration Program for young men, via a social class and race-ethnic mix of Norwegian secondary schools, an urban middle school journalism class, two senior English classes in a majority Black urban high school, to classes in a high-end private Grades 5–12 all-girls school. All four chapters engage in educationally applicable research, although none has set out to address particular school-based issues or problems. Rather, they all reflect a high commitment to what we have called “Let’s see” research, with a focus on trying to understand processes and events from the perspective of the teacher and student participants.

In their opening chapter on multimodal pedagogies, Lalitha Vasudevan, Tiffany DeJaynes and Stephanie Schmier identify “the profound act of teachers and students *knowing* each other through multimodal play in order to teach and learn together” (p. 35) witnessed and related by the researchers and experienced by them as central to all three cases in their study. Kevin Leander’s discussion of interview material (Chapter 3) provides rich insights into the play of dueling discourses in the consciousness of teachers in his study, and how this playing out of tensions contributes to producing classroom space-time in ways that constrain student opportunities for learning with laptops and internet access. Ola Erstad’s discussion of trajectories of remix (Chapter 2) taps into student and teacher responses to pedagogical approaches built on recognizing that “learning takes place in many contexts, taking experiences from one context over to another” (p. 54). Bronwen Low’s study of slam poetry in senior high school English classes (Chapter 4) pays particular attention to aspects of student and teacher identities through analysis of spoken data, performance, and poems.

With respect to conceptual, theoretical and methodological developments tailored to getting at *new* literacies, these chapters reflect a mix of careful innovation and exploration with appropriate combinations of existing approaches to researching literacy practices. Vasudevan, DeJaynes and Schmier innovate conceptually around their idea of “multimodal play,” introducing this concept to the study of new literacies and tapping its potential for understanding and explaining the way multimodal play opened up opportunities for learning and personal development in the cases they present. Erstad extends existing discussions of “remix” and adopts a methodological approach designed to describe and understand the *trajectories* of remix practices that afford new student perspectives on what it means “to be at school” (p. 49). Kevin Leander brings a spatial perspective to bear on the theme of technology refusal in schools. He shows how Ridgeview school was caught “in a struggle of expansion and contraction” through which school space-time was constituted in ways that powerfully constrained the potential for integrating new

technologies into classroom learning (p. 60). Bronwen Low makes a conceptual and theoretical case for “low tech” new literacies in her account of slam poetry, and draws on concepts from cultural studies and literacy theory to explore how a slam language arts unit *leveraged* out-of-school rap and freestyle literacies and *extended* them in ways that show how erstwhile literacy topics like audience and purpose in writing might be taught in characteristically contemporary ways.

(b) *Bridging “The Classroom” and “The Wider World”*

The second group of chapters considers contexts where schools might be seen as a kind of bridge between classrooms and the rest of the world. After-school clubs provide one kind of example of this space. Another kind of example represented here is where a school and a teacher make school resources available to students for pursuing their interests. Such spaces are often especially well-suited to promoting efficacious learning in the sense that the learning going on *now* has organic and motivated connections to what goes on in “mature” versions of a social practice during the course of life trajectories beyond the school (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996, p. 4).

In Chapter 5, Leif Gustavson presents the case of Gil, a 15-year-old African American turntablist enrolled in an elite private school where the jazz teacher had made a space backing off from the music room available for after school activity by students. This popular and heavily used space included a large set of music records and two turntables. Gustavson’s account is a form of “Let’s see” research that aims to understand Gil’s turntabling interest as “creative practice.” It is also, however, a highly applied case of educational research, whereby Gustavson uses his study to present a sequence of instructive ways for teachers to develop complex understanding of how youth like Gil work and learn “on their own terms” (p. 101). On the basis of such understanding teachers may transform classrooms into learning environments that actively appropriate the skills and sophistication inherent in creative practice that youth bring with them to school. Gustavson’s account of “creative practice” brings Aristotle’s concept of *tekhnē* together with Paul Willis’s idea of *grounded aesthetic*, focusing on the social practices of (youth) production rather than the products *per se*. Gustavson explores the “habits of mind and body”—performance, improvisation, self-reflection, interpretation and evaluation—integral to Gil’s creative practice. These are habits he carries with him everywhere as part of his everyday life, in the same way gamers, skateboarders, rappers, digital remixers and other popular cultural aficionados do. Such habits of body and mind can, and should, be mobilized in formal educational activity, and Gustavson suggests practical and exploratory ways for doing so.

Althea Nixon’s study of children engaging in digital storytelling (Chapter 6), and Kylie Pepler and Diane Glosso’s account of youth undertaking projects using e-textiles in projects based on electrical circuits (Chapter 7) are both situated within organized programs occurring outside school hours. Nixon examines children aged 5–11 years creating digital stories in an after-school club serving low-income Hispanic, African American, Pacific Island and Asian children in a southern California city. The study focused on benefits and limitations of digital storytelling for youth-identity play, as well as on the extent to which digital storytelling as a new literacy practice might be used to engage children in critical dialogue about issues of race, ethnicity and gender. It has educational applicability, but might also be seen as a form of “Try on” research where components of sociocultural and narrative theory are brought together to understand identity from the standpoint of narration as *multimodal*. There are likewise elements of a “Let’s see” approach as the researcher and undergraduate participants seek to understand the children’s sense-making through interviews/conversations with a purpose and cognitive ethnographies in the process of the children creating their digital stories.



Pepler and Glosson's study is designed to have direct and functional educational application. They are interested in the extent to which using e-textiles might enable young people to understand electronic circuits in ways that often prove challenging when taught using conventional resources like batteries, insulated wire, and light bulbs. The study seeks to provide "a foundation for integrating e-textile materials with standards-based practices in formal education systems" (p. 140) and indicate how teaching and assessment in classroom settings might be approached. It proceeds from Seymour Papert's insight into "the impact of specific tools ("objects to think with") on the ways that we learn and perceive subject matter" (p. 139). The researchers recorded and analyzed conversations among participants in the course of their hands-on activity, collected pre- and post-activity artifacts to evince changes in conceptual understanding, and recorded conversations between participants and outsiders which tapped participant understandings.

### *(c) Teacher Learning and Professional Development*

The third section of the book contains chapters that range over the diverse spaces of teacher learning as commonly referred to in terms of teacher education, teacher professional development, teacher growth, enhancing teacher expertise, and the like. Of course, in many ways it is confusing to think of this in terms of space at all, since learning travels all over. Like everything else it is connected to "everything else." Teachers carry the learning they do that is related to their professional work wherever they need to carry it, and find it wherever it arises. This section of the book is concerned with work that has sought consciously to focus on different kinds of initiatives where teachers are consciously involved in learning how to do and be in ways that enhance their understanding of and engagement with new kinds of literacy practices germane to their professional lives.

In Chapter 8, Andrew Burn presents an open, wide-ranging exploration of the work of an artist-teacher-animator/machinimator, Britta Pollmuller. The study focuses on Pollmuller's activities teaching animation in different forms (claymation, stop motion, machinima) to learners in a range of settings, culminating in her most recent involvement teaching machinima with 13–17-year-olds enrolled in the Open University's Schome (school + home) project in Second Life. Burn traces a rich trajectory in Pollmuller's recent experiences, as she transitioned from working as an artist-teacher in a school, to working as a freelance educator running projects in schools, discovering Second Life and exhibiting her art in its online galleries, teaching herself machinima and then teaching machinima to Shome-enrolled learners. Burn draws on interview data and observations conducted in Second Life, and frames his discussion around questions and issues arising at the interfaces "between media and art education, and between new technologies and adaptive uses of them by teachers and students" (p. 152). Throughout the elaboration of this case Burn draws on theory concerned respectively with art produced by mechanical means (Benjamin), aspects of performance (Goffman), collective intelligence (Levy), play (Sutton-Smith), and creativity (Vygotsky), among other threads, to elucidate his focal questions. The outcome is a classic "Let's see" study that speaks in interesting and fruitful ways to understanding online learning and its similarities and differences with respect to face-to-face learning.

Teresa Strong-Wilson and Dawn Rouse's chapter, "New wine in old bottles?" (Chapter 9), is grounded in a two-year professional development project—Learning with Laptops—undertaken by university-based researchers, school board personnel, and teachers within a school district in Quebec. Excerpted from a book-length study, this chapter revisits the two years of experience in the project from the standpoint of Bolter and Gussin's concept of remediation—the ways in which new media "refashion older media, and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the chal-

lenges of new media” (Bolter & Grusin, 2002, p. 15). Data collected throughout the project period by means of interviews, in situ observations, photos, logs, and teacher literacy autobiographies are analyzed to understand the ways in which and extent to which the past hovered over the present in the life of the project: “How were teachers ‘remediating’ their classroom practices and stories through their use of new technologies?” At the heart of the chapter is an extended analysis of the ways teacher experimentation with new technologies during the second year of the project generated a parallel pedagogy, involving improvisation and bricolage: meshing print and digital media in the best mixes the teachers could manage for handling teaching and learning tasks at hand. This study exemplifies a retrospective “Let’s see,” aimed at understanding from the inside how the learning processes and their applications unfolded from the perspective of the participants.

Chapter 10 presents a study by April Luehmann, Joe Henderson, and Liz Tinelli of a cohort of 20 pre-service teachers in a graduate science teacher education program who maintained individual professional blogs as a course requirement. The chapter presents an in-depth account of one blogger (Maya) plus two contrasting snapshots (Niklas and Elisabeth). Blogging occurred over 15 months and across all courses in the program. The researchers report a thematic analysis of Maya’s blogging corpus: 60 posts, 1880 lines, 129 comments received and 200 comments posted to peer blogs. The result is a rich explication from the perspective of the researchers of the nature, scope, and role blogging played in Maya’s professional growth as a reform-minded science teacher in the course of pre-service preparation. The brief summative contrasting snapshots of Niklas and Elisabeth’s blogging, together with a report of analytic results of the entire cohort’s responses to a self-assessment task augment the central case in the study. Key findings from the analysis of all data are presented by way of conclusion, with preference to opportunities, constraints, and productive purposes served by this instance of blogging in the context of professional preparation.

In Chapter 11, Margaret Hagood, Emily Skinner, Melissa Venters, and Benjamin Yelm report research focusing on two teachers involved in a two-year initiative designed to implement new literacies strategies within content-area instruction in classrooms. Informed by theory and research from studies of adolescent literacy and popular culture, multimodality, and new media, the chapter focuses on how the teachers (Melissa and Ben) designed instruction to address state standards for social studies in ways that employed digital multimedia within visual literacy formats—photostories and comic strips—as means for their students to learn curriculum content. Drawing on artifacts and transcriptions of in situ speech and interviews, the chapter offers a vivid account of classroom activity within a wider analytic frame that emphasizes connections between identities, content area instruction, assessment, and student outcomes in the course of teachers’ professional learning “on the job.” Of particular interest is the way the study reflects the teachers’ drawing on their intersecting identities as knowledgeable social studies teachers and proficient new literacies exponents to keep multiple literacies—academic literacy, content literacy, new literacies, performance and formative assessment—*together* within schoolwork as they learned new instructional strategies; thereby resisting the kinds of literacy dichotomies that foster perceptions of students in “unsatisfactory” schools as being “unsuccessful” in academic literacies “when in fact they are competent” (p. 224).

#### *(d) Spaces of Popular Cultural Affinities*

Apart, perhaps, from classroom settings, the space addressed in the fourth section is the best-subscribed space within new literacies research. This is the non-formal domain of participation in popular cultural affinities like game playing and media remixing.



This section opens with Rebecca Black's chapter on language, culture and identity (Chapter 12). It focuses on how networked technologies and fan culture provide a teenaged migrant English language learning student (Nanako) with a context for developing her English language and writing skills while simultaneously developing an online identity as a popular multiliterate writer of fan fiction. For its theoretical base, the study draws on concepts of identity/identities, D/discourse and dialogic resources, from Second Language Acquisition theory and Literacy, Cultural and Media Studies. Methodologically, it employs a form of discourse analysis informed by Bakhtin's concept of dialogic resources and Gee's notion of language as part of Discourses, and applies this to transcribed excerpts from Nanako's fan fiction works, her author notes, reader feedback, and Nanako's responses to reader feedback. The analysis helps us understand phenomena like shifts in Nanako's writing and language use, narrative resources she draws upon to produce her fiction, the aspects of self she foregrounds as a fan fiction writer, and how these aspects of self change over time. These understandings inform an educationally applicable discussion of the play between ascribed and achieved identities. First and foremost, however, the study is an illuminating instance of "Let's see" research.

In a similar vein, in "Communication, coordination and camaraderie" (Chapter 13), Mark Chen draws on an online participant ethnography of a group of players in *World of Warcraft*. Part of a larger study, this chapter contrasts two nights of game playing—one successful, the other unsuccessful—to describe and understand communication and coordination practices within group endeavor. This account is informed by competing strands of emergent computer game (playing) theory, one of which emphasizes the *modeling* of game-playing behavior and mechanics-based motivations, while the other emphasizes *player practice* within social situations and foregrounds *social* norms and responsibilities defined by social contexts. During the several-months life of the group—before it imploded beyond possible revival—Chen amassed a rich data set of online interactions inside and outside of game play. Vivid instances and episodes are presented and analyzed throughout the chapter, providing a rich "as if I were there" experience for the reader. Chen takes a "look and see" approach to making sense of what he was involved in as a key participant. He concludes that for a team to succeed it needs "good communication and coordination," and this occurs when "team members trust each other in their specialized roles." In Chen's experience, strong trust was based on "strong goals and well-established relationships" rather than on "individual incentives" (p. 265).

Angela Thomas' chapter on youth participation (Chapter 14) explores ways of learning among a group of young people engaging in a range of online activities centered on strong interests in the Tolkien world of Middle Earth. Participants role play, discuss, perform poetry recitals and engage in story writing within a role-playing web forum created by four members of the group, and in an online graphical chat world (a Middle Earth palace). The study is strongly informed by Etienne Wenger's social model of learning within communities of practice. A key theme for Thomas is that the participants in her study (average age 13 years) learned from and with others like themselves—*novices* learning as they go—without reliance on the availability of recognized experts. The study trawls online interviews, stretches of chat and role play, and artifacts created by participants, to understand how they learned together and individually (as individuals in relationship with others sharing common purposes) to create, maintain, and grow their community; how they learned the language of role playing and, more generally, how to be literate online; how they combined "modes of being" (p. 275) in order to learn and expand repertoires of role playing; how to push the limits of their available technologies; and so on. This is an example of "Let's see" inquiry conducted from the standpoint of a peripheral observer seeking to understand learning within spaces of shared interests and, in doing so, providing insights relevant to learning within more formal settings.



This section concludes with Bronwyn Williams' investigation of how a population of students draw on popular cultural resources and "ways" to compose identities in online social media sites (Chapter 15). Williams draws on theory and research from the ethnography of literacy, and studies of discourse, culture and media to inform his analysis of web site content and interview material. He seeks to understand from the perspectives of the study participants how and why they have composed and performed online identities the ways they have, as well as to explore the range of readings such performances make available, and the social "work" these composed/performed identities do. Williams also considers how the kinds of identities in question might be understood in terms of larger constructions of identity like gender, race, sexual orientation and social class (p. 282). The study concludes that the students' uses of popular culture for composing identities online is not haphazard but, rather, "is a conscious process of self-inquiry and self-editing [which is] as considered and reflected on as what clothes to wear and which group to sit with at lunch" (p. 300).

### *(e) Researcher Perspectives on New Literacies*

The concluding section of the book contains three chapters approached here from the "space" of researchers making sense of people engaging in new literacies in ways that are of educational interest. To some extent our interest and purpose with respect to these chapters lies in what they have to say about what happens and how within particular contexts and cases of engaging in new literacies. Primarily, however, we are interested in what they demonstrate about *how* to undertake research into new literacies, paying particular attention to conceptual, theoretical, and methodological considerations.

James Gee introduces the concluding section to this Reader with what might be described as an auto-ethnographic case study of learning to play a real time strategy video game (*Rise of Nations*) blended with an analysis of the experiences of learning the game in terms of the kinds of understanding such analysis may provide on the nature of "deep learning." To a large extent this analysis takes the form of looking for patterns in the data; patterns that can be categorized as instances and types of principles of good learning. Gee's study is informed by theory from cognitive science, social cognition, discourse processes, the New Literacy Studies, neural science/brain studies, social linguistics, and social semiotics. Methodologically, Gee proceeds by collecting data from the game as *artifact*, the game as *played*, and the game as a *system* of process potentialities, rules, feedback mechanisms and so on. The analytic approach is hybrid, reflecting techniques employed in discourse analysis, philosophical analysis, categorical analysis, and content analysis, mobilized in a version of grounded theory. There is a subtle interplay between grounded analysis through which patterns emerge from the data and are interpreted into, or distilled as, principles (of good learning), on one hand, and analysis that is guided to some extent by extant theory as identified above. The chapter concludes with a statement of 25 learning principles Gee identifies as being built into *Rise of Nations*. While this research has important educational implications, and Gee makes regular reference to the challenges good video game learning principles raise for formal education, it is also very much a form of research undertaken for the purpose of understanding the game in its own terms as a kind of learning system.

The penultimate chapter continues the theme of learning in the content of computer and video games. Aaron Hung's "Situated play: Instruction and learning in fighting games" (Chapter 17) investigates what and how players learn when they interact with a video game and, in this case, with other players at different levels of video game expertise in the process of learning a new game. This chapter demonstrates an exponent of Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis at work. Hung states his purpose in terms of an ethnomethodological maxim that "people's first experience with a phenomenon is



an interaction that cannot be fully recaptured in a *post hoc* recollection” (p. 322). Since learning is messy and does not proceed in any kind of linear fashion it needs to be captured at the time, and captured as fully and accurately as possible. Hung further specifies his purpose by situating it in the company of work that aims to understand participants’ orientation to a new activity through their social organization. To realize his purposes as optimally as possible Hung describes how he chose a mix of novice and expert game players, but asked them to choose a game they were not familiar with, and arranged for them to play the game in physical proximity. His data collection employs standard conversation analytic procedures, producing transcripts in accordance with routine conventions of conversation analysis, and proceeding to explicate the analysis in the immediate context of the transcription and with very close reference to it. At all points the analysis aims to address the messy complexity *and* orderliness inherent in what “the players do and say as they try to instruct another player [in] how to play the game” (p. 350). At key points the analytic explication is referenced to ideas, arguments and positions within ethnomethodological literature. In a brief discussion at the end, which might also be seen in terms of applying some findings, Hung uses the results of his analysis to problematize and recontextualize some familiar ideas and positions associated with the concepts of situated learning and just-in-time learning.

The book concludes with Sean Duncan’s report of research that investigates participants’ discursive practices and design talk, and how this design talk was employed within one forum in an online gaming affinity space. Duncan’s study is a form of what we call “Try on” research that pursues fruitful innovation in methodology. It “experiments” with bringing versions of D/discourse analysis and content analysis together in a mixed methodology with a view to exploring its potential for expanding the nature and scope of new literacies research based on the notion of affinity spaces. The chapter reports, rigorously and in depth, the rationale, purposes, design, theoretical informants, data collection, data analysis method, and analytic results of the study, before discussing the main findings, drawing conclusions, and considering the implications of the study for further development of research into affinity spaces. From a theoretical perspective the study draws especially on Gee’s theory of D/discourse and Donald Schön’s work on “design talk” and its types and rules. The methodological innovation involves bringing D/discourse analysis together with a form of content analysis derived from Philipp Mayring. This is intended to address what Duncan sees as limitations in the scope of affinity spaces research to date that draws on Discourse analysis alone. Duncan argues that Discourse analytic studies can investigate detailed meaning-making exchanges within affinity spaces, focusing on “specifics,” and reveal “fascinating and compelling moments of verbal exchange between participants within affinity spaces,” but is not suited to identifying and understanding “the overall character of an affinity space’s textual content” and discerning discursive *commonalities* within single affinity spaces and across affinity spaces (p. 354). Duncan’s account of “Kongregating online” centers on exploring and demonstrating the potential of his multi-method Discourse + Qualitative Content Analytic approach, within the context of a motivated focus on two facets of design integral to the Kongregate affinity space: design at the level of learning about successful game design and engaging in design talk to this end; and design at the level of how the affinity space has been constructed by its managers, and how its design constraints shape activity within the space.

## This Volume and the “New Literacies” Series

This Reader *samples* the past five years of the New Literacies book series. It has aimed as far as possible to represent the full scope of the types of work and interests addressed by the series as a whole,





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but with a view to where inquiry has currently reached more than where it has come from. This is a pragmatic choice that incurs costs, foremost among them the inability to include interesting and important work undertaken in the early stages of development of a field. For readers not familiar with the series, but whose interest in new literacies may be stimulated by the content of the present book, we strongly encourage them to consult the full contents list on the Peter Lang USA website at: <http://bit.ly/11YZfll>.

## A Note on Spelling Conventions

Throughout the book we have preserved the respective authors' spelling preferences from the original publications of their work. Most chapters employ Standard American English spelling, but several employ alternative English spelling conventions.

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