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Reassessing the Theorisation of Community Experience within the Digitally Mediated, Global Context

Abstract
This paper argues that the changing environment in which community experience occurs requires re-theorisation within the digitally mediated, global context. A range of work has certainly emerged addressing this, but there is more to be done, including tracing a theoretical lineage of community studies. Beginning with the early Chicago School, community was described as geographically bounded. Decades later, community experience mediated by digital technology has been commonly understood to be about virtual community. Ironically, many virtual community scholars have perpetuated the Chicago School perspective in examinations of online groupings, the only difference being that such ‘boundedness’ now referred to relatively fixed locations in cyberspace. As an emerging alternative, a parallel range of literature has focused upon the immersion of ICT-mediated social relations into everyday life. It is argued that Wellman’s networked individualism provides a way to integrate the online/offline mediated social experience, however it is not a sufficiently complete metaphor to describe spatially distributed, mediated community experiences. From the work of Robert Park, a member of the early Chicago School, the idea of the social ‘ecology’ of place can be adapted to provide a connecting thread into digitally mediated ecologies of community experience. In this paper it will be demonstrated that understandings of contemporary community are enhanced, not through abandoning each theory of (virtual) community in favour of the next, but through the consideration of related bodies of work in light of one another, and through the incorporation of enduring aspects of preceding theories into current formulations to enhance understanding.

Keywords: Virtual community, online/offline, Internet, networked individualism, digital social ecology, Chicago school.

1.0 Introduction: Community and technology
Existing literature on the topic of ‘community’ discusses it as either geographically bound or situated within a network of social ties based upon a common interest. Community is classically defined by social connection, cohesion, continuity and solidarity. The overriding concerns for these trends relate to the capacity of groups, networks, communities and societies for collective action and personal well-being through social connection. Contemporary society is integrated with Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) as the mediating forms that enable social
interaction across local and non-local (dispersed) contexts. When aspects of community experience are meditated by digital technology, they are commonly understood to be about virtual community. Thus can ‘community’ be understood in the contemporary socio-cultural milieu. However, to begin with refutation of a contrary position, Sardar (1995) argues that a sense of community belongs only to geographical spaces and that this is a key part of connecting with people in a reciprocal way. He argues that behaviours online do not facilitate this.

… In essence, a real community is where you have to worry about other people because they will always be there. In cyberspace you can shut people out with a click of a button and go elsewhere. One therefore has no responsibility of any kind…Cyberspace is to community what Rubber Rita is to a woman. (Sardar 1995:787-8)

To be fair, this particular understanding of the relationship between community and digital technology is, at the time of writing, sixteen years old, and ICTs have come a long way in the interim. It is the position of this paper that such a viewpoint, colourful though it may be, has little currency now (if indeed it ever did). Nonetheless, such theorizing persists in that the idea of the ephemerality of virtual community/online interaction used by Castells (2001:130) (also see Bauman, 2001; Keen, 2007) for this kind of approach; it is based upon the perception that technology use is not a part of our everyday lives and therefore anything that occurs through it cannot be experienced as emotionally supportive, cohesive or continuous. On the contrary, a range of literature has focused upon the immersion of ICT-mediated social relations into everyday life including Bakardjieva and Smith (2001), Katz and Rice (2002), Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) and Wellman et al. (2002). Wellman argues that given the movement from the “local and densely knit to the far flung and the sparsely knit, it is not useful to think about community as group-like neighborhoods and villages. It is more useful to define community as networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity” (Wellman et al., 2002:153). The dichotomy of the spatialisation of community experience versus the relational patterns of social ties apparent in the above two definitions has led to an unreconciled divergence in the literature and a decoupling of the insights made in each field with the other’s. It is argued in this paper that this divergence can best be reconciled through directed attention to the second, more loose-knit position described. This approach enables a focus upon community through the combination of the structures of social ties within the situated context of a digitally mediated ecology without a priori assumptions of the boundaries and composition that constitute a contemporary community experience. Nonetheless, following the trajectory of other, geographically bounded and often earlier conceptions of community brings to light the possibility
of their coexistence and ongoing relevance both beside and within more networked and nebulous community forms, despite the complexities and apparent contradictions that might be raised.

This paper will trace the journey of neighbourhood community studies in the tradition of the Chicago School to the utopian/dystopian schizophrenia of virtual community studies, and in so doing draw attention to both their disjunctures and their similarities.

2.0 The community studies of the Chicago School tradition

The three classical sociological studies of community conducted within the early Chicago School tradition were Frederic Thrasher’s *The Gang* (1927), William Whyte’s *Street Corner Society* (1943) and Herbert Gans’ *The Urban Villagers* (1962). These influential studies of community experience focused upon lower socio-economic groups in Boston and Chicago “Slum” areas. Whyte and Thrasher’s focus upon gang structure, distribution and formation demonstrates an attempt to uncover the basic principles behind the formation and continuity of social groups. To this end, Thrasher (1927) conducted an ecological survey of 1,313 gangs in Chicago. He argued that the informal structure of the gang, once formed, engages with the context of a feudal system called “Gangland” that exists within three domains of Chicago, each of which in turn breaks up into smaller kingdoms. Thrasher argued that “they are natural areas, differentiated in the process of human interaction, and having their own characteristic place in the mosaic of city life” (1927:6). In this way, Thrasher saw the social patterns of the gang as tied to a specific spatial location in the city that was, both in terms of place and deviant behaviour, socially interstitial.

Thrasher’s approach was an example of Robert Park’s human ecology perspective on how the spatial relationships of human populations adapted to their environment. Park, an influential theorist of the Chicago School, argued that there were forces at work within the limits of the urban community that tended to bring about an orderly and typical grouping of its population and institutions (Park et al., 1925:1). He went on to argue that transportation and communication technologies, as the mediums that brought about the mobility and concentration of urban populations, were primary factors in the ecological organisation of the city. Park’s colleague, McKenzie, in his own contribution to this idea, argued that human ecology was the study of “the spatial and temporal relations of human beings as affected by the selective distributive, and accommodative forces of the environment” (McKenzie, 1967:63). Through this notion of social relations within a contextual ecology of transportation and communication technologies situated in space and time, it is possible to see that Park and McKenzie’s conceptions of community, while firmly geographically bounded, might only have been so because these men were a product of their times. What might they have
made of the Internet, one wonders? Indeed, the ‘urban ecology’ of the Chicago School elegantly precursors the discussion of digital social ecologies addressed later in this paper.

William Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society* study looked at two ethnic gangs in an Italian-American slum he called “Cornerville” in Boston's North End. He demonstrates a clear contrast between the intrinsic social ties within an informally organised gang and the extrinsic social ties of a formally organised one. The two case studies represent a socially static connection to the community through the maintenance of strong ties in the informally organised gang, and social mobility through disconnection from the community and the accumulation of weak social ties in the formally organized gang. The notions of strong and weak social ties as different means of facilitating support and diversity (representing levels of emotional connection and disconnection) will be returned to in the review of literature on mediated social relations and Hampton’s (2001) conceptions of social capital. In fact, there can be little doubt that Hampton’s “Netville” (2001), a component of that later literature, is a direct allusion and homage to Whyte’s earlier “Cornerville” formation.

Herbert Gans’ (1962) *Urban Villagers* study focused upon an Italian-American immigrant community in Boston’s West End. He developed the notion of the Peer Group Society to describe the fundamental nature of social ties, rather than the neighbourhood place, in creating the cohesion and continuity of community experience (support and socialisation). This notion of the community experience of support and sociability being independent of physical location (ie mobile) feeds directly into the ensuing discussion of online/offline sociability.

Each of these early studies employed differing perspectives on the relationship between place, social relations and community experience due to the non-standardised theoretical frameworks within the Chicago School ethnography. The lack of theoretical consistency towards the notion of community evident in these works is a continuing theme of community studies in more contemporary literature (Bell and Newby 1978). The common elements in these three works are the detailed ethnography that went towards describing group dynamics through social relations within their environmental context. The result of this bias towards observation over theoretical and methodological consistency can be seen in Gans’ extrapolation of the observed social relations as a reflection of the internal processes of the individual into the external world of the group. The internal psychology of the individual was seen as embedded in a reciprocal process that reinforced the group structure, values and boundary production of the community as a whole.
The ‘Chicago School’ researchers concluded independently that an individual’s total social immersion within the group in which they experienced a sense of community resulted in their identity and meaning making becoming contextual to the group. The result of this group-specific identity was that they were largely incapable, as individual people and as a community, of relating to people socially outside of this structure. Gans viewed this as a class subculture cut off from the larger society due to the lack of shared values. What is particularly clear from these early community studies is that closed social relations and group patterns kept people within their social position rather than assisting in their social mobility. The end result of this static social replay was made particularly clear in the work of Gans by his demonstration of the incapacity of the immigrant community for collective action due to their highly individualised identities within their peer group and the inability of community members to emotionally connect with heterogeneous others. The ensuing discussion of ICT-mediated social relations, online social capital and online social activism will demonstrate that the community experience is no longer based upon these closed social configurations or group-specific identity and that networked individualism and portfolios of sociability are synergistic with social heterogeneity and the episodic nature of collective action. Nonetheless, through the conceptions of community considered thus far, particularly Park and McKenzie’s ‘accommodative forces’ of communication technologies and Gans’ liberation of peer group ties from geographic neighborhood, it becomes clear that the theorisations of the early Chicago School and those pertaining to later, virtual formations are in no sense discontinuous.

3.0 Virtual community

The construct of virtual community has a tendency to dichotomise online social life as either utopian or dystopian (Hampton, 2001; Wellman and Leighton, 1979; Fisher and Wright, 2001). Whilst there are several theoretical frameworks for such utopia and dystopia, the key implications for this broad body of social theory lies in the capacity of the Internet to facilitate or impede collective action and individual well-being through constructs such as community and society. This debate situates itself in arguments of whether online interaction connects (Hampton, 2001; Rheingold, 2000; Wellman et al., 2001; Boase and Wellman, 2006) or disconnects people from each other and place (Nie and Hillygus, 2002; Nie, 2001; Nie et al., 2002; Turkle, 1997; Turkle, 2003; Turkle, 2007a; Turkle, 2007b; Turkle, 2011). These perspectives accumulate to suggest that there is indeed a broadscale social, or a broadscale theoretical disconnect occurring (Kolb, 2008) – in all probability both, the latter as a product of the former. However, such disconnects may also provide the space for alternative connections and social (re)organisation. Fisher and Wright (2001) proposed that the disjunction in this debate is a result of the focus on the effects of the Internet on society (utopian perspective) versus understanding the phenomenon of the user’s experience
(generally perceived as inherently negative – the dystopian perspective). The dualism of this outlook indicates that the Internet is affecting people at both the macro and the micro level (social structure and social agency) and that these effects may at times be contradictory. In a clear shot through this dualism, Boase and Wellman (2006) argued that the utopian and dystopian writers shared an overly simplistic view of Internet use due to their failure to place it in a broader pattern of common social tendencies. The result being that they ignored the complex array of social factors that affect how the Internet is actually used by the general population (2006:4). In a similar vein, Fisher and Wright (2001) have argued that the Internet has the capacity to change how individuals interact with others as well as increase access to information. This debate demonstrates that the key aspects of the Internet, decentralisation of information and mediated social connection, affect and change how collective action happens (Johnston and Laxer, 2003; Tilly 2004; Mesch, and Levanon 2006; Fuchs, 2006; Lai-Yee, 2007) and how people generate emotional/social connections and well-being in this environment (Boase et al., 2006; Fox, 2000; Burrows et al., 2000; Klemm and Hardie, 2002; Joseffson, 2005; Im et al., 2007; Houston et al., 2002; Valkenburg and Peter, 2009; Eysenbach et al., 2004).

3.1 Possible limitations to the virtual community construct
There is an irony inherent in the lineage postulated here from early community studies such as those in the Chicago School vein to the notions of virtual community that emerged with the rise of the Internet. Or, more specifically, those earlier community studies led to the repetition, in some of the first examinations of online groupings, of theories of community as geographically bounded. The only difference being that such ‘boundedness’ now referred to relatively fixed locations in cyberspace, that is, to foci around particular online communities (often focused, in turn, around particular websites) rather than exploring the heterogeneity and multiple identifications that life online has the potential to facilitate. Or, to extrapolate, the linking of community studies with virtual community literature has resulted due to the use of the notion of community to group people in space (albeit in a theoretically inconsistent way) and the tendency of researchers to treat these two bodies of work as situated consecutively along Gidden’s (1984) historical elongation of social structures through time-space distanciation of technological innovation. Proponents of the utopian/dystopian debate were extremely prolific around the turn of the century. This activity represented a time where theoretical ideas were developing alongside technological innovations and changing social configurations, but the pace of supportive evidence-based research lagged.

And in some circles, the continued focus upon virtual community has persevered, a phenomenon attributable to persistent interest in engaging people in online-specific environments and using the
social relations which form around these environments as ways to keep the environment viably populated over time (often tying motivations such as commercial, educational, entertainment and social networking into one platform). Examples of this include: online learning management systems and online education (Dougiamas and Taylor, 2003; Kemp and Livingstone, 2006; Yang et al., 2004; Yang, 2006); online shopping (Miller, 2009; Mutz, 2009; Jepsen, 2006; Hsiu-Fen, 2008; Cyr et al., 2007); online gaming (Yee, 2006; Ege and Koullapis, 2009; Isabella 2007; Postigo, 2007); Nachez and Schmoll, 2003; Chee, 2006); social bookmarking and multimedia platforms such as Deviantart and YouTube (Lange, 2007; Santos et al., 2007; Zontea, 2010; Pronovost, 2009); online support platforms for disability, disease and emotional disorders (Fox and Roberts, 1999; Hoybye et al., 2005; Eun-Ok et al., 2007; Gavrin, 2005; Sharp, 2000) and web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook and Myspace (Beer and Burrows, 2007; Boyd, 2006; Boyd, 2007b; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Hardey, 2007; Steinfield et al., 2008; Ellison et al., 2007; Goodings et al., 2007; Pasek et al., 2009). Whilst these platform environments present unique ecosystems from which notions such as online trust (in strangers and the online environment itself), prosumption (the production and consumption of content by the user), user engagement and online support can be explored, they do not relate their findings back to the core concerns of community studies. Nor do they necessarily draw connections back from online worlds to offline ones. This is because the research has been generated for specific agendas such as usability and gaming design, marketing, student retention, media studies and health modeling, to name but a few.

But there is another stream of literature on mediated sociability (also referred to in early literature as computer-mediated communication: Simpson, 2002; Rice and Love, 1987; Walther, 1996), literature that has diverged from the initial concerns raised in the debate over the capacity for collective action and individual well-being to being populated by case studies of online environments that, rather than treating cyberspace as a new venue for bounded community, explore the thorough integration of Internet use into everyday life (see Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002 for several discussions of this trend).

4.0 Networked Sociability

The form and parameters of digitised communities within an offline neighbourhood and the ensuing interpersonal/intergroup relations and social ties are explored in Keith Hampton’s study of ‘Netville’ (2001). Key arguments resulting from this work include: the intermingling by residents of mediated and face-to-face connections for support (or the mixing of online/offline sociability); that high-speed Internet access supports neighbouring rather than weakening it (Wellman et. al., 2003); and the connection between relational notions of community and social capital. Hampton
(2001:17-18) argued (in line with Putnam, 2000) that Network Social Capital (or Bridging Capital) recognises that access to diverse social ties of different strengths provides access to a broad range of supportive resources. Bonding Social Capital, on the other hand, facilitates increased norms of trust and measures the capacity for collective action and group cohesion.

In a related set of ideas, Wellman et al. (2003) has argued for the transition of community networks into personalised ones based upon a concept called ‘networked individualism’. He maintains that these complex networks based upon individualism have always existed but that with recent developments in ICT, they have become the dominant form of social organisation (2001:228). This is where people connect in multiple, self-directed social networks rather than in communal groups (Wellman, 2001), and in so doing skirt around the boundedness of community addressed in the early stages of this paper. Further to this they argued (Wellman et al., 2003) that these fragmented, partial, heavily communicating social networks are based upon digitally mediated personalised ones. In their turn, Foth and Hearn (2007) argue that Wellman’s (2001, 2002) networked individualism describes the ambivalent nature inherent in any given person’s egocentric yet still well-connected social interactions:

Individuals take control of their personal portfolio of sociability and add, grow, connect, disconnect, merge and split with other nodes and social clusters as they see fit. The behaviour that governs these social relationships is driven by the individuals themselves and their personal needs and preferences. This constitutes a shift from the traditional sense of community as collective group behaviour. (Foth and Hearn, 2007:750)

This egocentric ambivalence sees the boundaries of networked societies as permeable; interactions are with diverse others, connections switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive (Wellman, 2001:227). This trend of personal portfolios of sociability goes hand in hand with the trend of customisation and personalisation of the web. The implications for identity formation, meaning creation and social intimacy in this environment are that they can either be understood through the reconfiguration of emotional (dis)connection created by technological mediation or that re-theorisation of these experiences will demonstrate an alternative space in which communal formats do occur. From Wellman’s perspective, the communal experience of identity construction, socialisation, exchange and support occurs within a technologically mediated ecosystem of partially attended or “portfolio” relationships.
Specific literature on mediated sociability is a separate yet related body of work that supports our understanding of the impact of ICTs on the ways social networks actually interact. A key concept from this field is the effect of modern, connect-from-anywhere computing (also referred to as pervasive or ubiquitous computing, see for example Vetere et al., 2005) on the mobility and accessibility of our social relations. This type of connectivity creates a situation whereby we are “always on” (Hampton, 2001:29), that is a 24/7 access period characterised by constant social presence, or presence-in-absence (Howard et al., 2006; Green, 2001). Given the convergence (van Dijk, 2006) and multimedia interactivity of video, sound and textual communication channels within social relations (Heyer and Brereton, 2006), the public/private space of relationships is demonstrated as changing (Boyd, 2007a; Boyd, 2008; Lange, 2007; Donath and Boyd, 2004). The capacity for anonymity online and its resultant social effects remain topical (the dystopian theorists had a field day around this notion in the opening years of the 21st century) but such concerns are not directly related to social isolation as anonymity has historically been (see Barrett, 2011 for a nuanced discussion of online anonymity). Given the function of the Internet for connecting with strong and weak social ties, Internet accessibility is of key importance and relates to the body of work on the impact of the digital divide proposed by Castells (2001).

The United Nations has declared that Internet access is a human right (United Nations and Rue, 2011)1 however Castells (2001:265) describes the digital divide as existing in the uneven development of internet accessibility at the local, national and global level. Benitez (2006) argues that “accessibility, quality of the technological connectivity and appropriation of the Internet and ICTs demand the consideration of different dimensions of the digital divide: socio-economic, knowledge, gender, generation, ethnic, family, language and disability gaps” (p.193). In terms of motivations and Internet skills, digital literacy is proposed to be an important aspect of the digital divide (Hargittai, 2007; 2005; Hargittai and Hinnant, 2006; Scardamalia, 2003). All of these factors stratify and alter the potential for people to engage with their social networks via ICTs.

Lastly, the literature highlights the notion of the serendipity effect of “known” strong and weak tie relations and the intermingling with anonymous others online. The non-linearity of social ties and network configurations in this social environment results in the potential for the form and frequency of flows between two points to have reverberations in unexpected paths far removed from those intended (Hargittai and Centeno, 2001). This relates to the classic notion of the ‘six degrees of separation’ that has its empirical basis in research on the small-world phenomenon which demonstrates that:

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the structure of a network can have dramatic implications for the collective dynamics of a system, whose connectivity the network represents. In particular, … large changes in dynamical behavior could be driven by even subtle modifications to the network structure – modifications that may be imperceptible to actors with only local knowledge of the network. (Watts, 2004:246)

Kleinberg (2000a; 2000b) refined this idea of an all-connected network effect by arguing that social networks were not only made “small” (read “more easily accessed”, in the same sense that the world is becoming “smaller” as a result of improving information technologies) through their links but searchable. He demonstrated that network structure is important not only locally, where an individual’s neighbourhood provides them with information and resources, but also globally in that it enables them to navigate when searching for information or resources outside of their immediate locality (discussed in Watts, 2004:248).

5.0 Conclusion: the social ecology

It is clear from the above discussion that networked sociability occurs in a mediating environment or ecology of online and offline social ties. The notion of virtual community has been demonstrated to be insufficient, at least on its own, to describe this environment and the literature on networked sociability has here been added to the theoretical mix, as it were, to describe the types of interactions that do occur and the impact that ICTs have upon this interaction. This idea of discussing social relations as contained by an ecology of mobile social relations mediated by equally mobile technology is reflective of Park’s ecological approach to offline² neighbourhoods described above. In what can be interpreted as a relatively linear development, Nardi and O’Day (1999) focus on the information ecology inherent in a local environment, such as a library, which does not include the distance relations that Hampton’s ‘Netville’ study pointed out as being a critical aspect of social action in our contemporary techno-milieu. The key power of their idea is their use of ‘ecology’ as a metaphor/organising principle for social form in continual change. As Foth (2007:756) argues, an ecology operates as a ‘web of life’ and a web is a network. This therefore ties the ecological approach firmly to the network approach. Foth and Hearn argued that a communicative ecology integrates the three dimensions of ‘online and offline’, ‘global and local’ and ‘collective and networked’ (2007:751). Their definition of a communicative ecology operationalises the layers of infrastructure, people and content that circulate within the environment. Their three dimensions or layers are further defined thus:
A technological layer which consists of the devices and connecting media that enable communication and interaction. A social layer which consists of people and social modes of organizing those people – which might include, for example, everything from informal social networks to more formal community associations, as well as commercial or legal entities …. [and 3] a discursive layer which is the content, that is, the ideas or themes that constitute the conversations and narratives of the ecology. (Foth and Hearn, 2007:756)

These definitions of social ecologies remain locally based or place-based entities that then focus upon the reach of the network outwards to the global while being geographically connected inwards. Whilst Foth and Hearn (2007) draw upon Wellman’s personalised portfolios of sociability, the communicative ecology that they describe is the social networks of residents in three inner-city apartment buildings rather than an ecology based around the intersection of a range of socially linked portfolios that represent a non-place-based networked community. What they do achieve, however, is to provide the initial parameters of how to conceptualise a “place” in which networked social interactions occur that combine online and offline interactions, people, organisations and content-oriented clusters.

In following the literature of emergent social form as defined by its ecology, Latham and Sassen (2005) propose the notion of the digital formation. The distinction of the digital formation is that it is not tied to local place (online or off-) but retains a unique digital and social ecology. They propose that communication and information structures are human ‘habitats’ or ecologies with mediating cultures that are anchored in the social relations associated with public spheres, networks, organisations, and markets (2005:8), but not tied firmly to them, in the sense addressed above. As an alternative, the coherence of the form is to be identified by the configurations of space, organisation and interaction (2005:10). That is, this definition of form creates a social space that is technologically and socially tied, but not as situated. The scale of the digital formation is a defining key variable in this instance as it allows such forms to consist of non-state actors, cross-border processes and associated changes in the scope, exclusivity and competence of state authority over its territory (2005:34). Latham and Sassen argue that digital networks strengthen the multi-scalar character of many social processes, particularly processes that do not fit into nested hierarchies (2005:23). Their ‘digital formations’ fit comfortably with Wellman’s ‘networked individualism’ and ‘portfolios of sociability’ as, although the connections in the literature are not explicit, Wellman’s ideas do not constitute hierarchically nested concepts either. In terms of how digital formations relate to the notion of community, Latham and Sassen argue that:
Community, especially as thought about in electronic terms, is a complicated matter, but we take it to mean that configurations of space, organization, and interaction sustain a common identity around shared goals and reciprocal relations among participants, and that such identity, goals, and reciprocity are an important and substantive aspect of each of participant’s life, professional or personal. (Latham and Sassen, 2005:13)

In this way, we can see that it is the multi-scalar nature of mediated reciprocity that is a key variable to the common elements of community experience, established by the Chicago School theorists, of identity and values. These ecological approaches to defining social form point to the changing environment in which community experience occurs and the requirement for the re-theorisation of community experience within the digitally mediated, global context.

The line from the earliest, place-based theorisations of community attributable to the Chicago School, through to the range of endeavours seeking to explain today’s on- and offline techno-cultural environments, is not an unbroken one. Nonetheless, drawing on ‘ecology’ as a connecting thread or recurrent theme, as above, it has been demonstrated that such a line certainly exists, and that understandings of contemporary community are enhanced not through abandoning one theory in favour of the next, but through the consideration of related bodies of work in the light of one another, and through the incorporation of enduring aspects of preceding theories into current formulations to enhance understanding.

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**Footnotes**

1 Citation notwithstanding, the authors wish to register a certain degree of incredulity here; placing broadband access on a par with fundamental necessities such as food and shelter seems a bit of a stretch.

2 Not that he had any inkling of the word.