The ways in which knowledge gains the cultural capital to be used as content—and curriculum—have been, for millenia, related to economics. The sophists were paid for their knowledge, which they acquired through years of listening and remembering. They were paid for knowledge because it was a rare commodity; indeed, as Gandel, Katz, and Metros (2004) argue, "the history of human learning can perhaps best be described in terms of a lack of abundance, or scarcity" (40). Throughout much of human history, knowledge was scarce, difficult to record, and difficult to verify.

Writing added to knowledge-conservation techniques. In the medieval period, a monk with his stylus embarked upon a painstaking reconstruction of each word in each book, writing not his own ideas but those that were already known and approved. Universities developed out of these monastic roots. The advent of the printing press fostered a new proliferation of books and a growing belief that knowledge was, by definition, what was contained in books: “Literacy became a way of organizing knowledge and cataloguing new knowledge, until—over centuries—it became what it means to know, and to educate” (Stewart 2002, 50). Much more content became available, and the number of people who were able to consume that content also increased relatively quickly (Gandel, Katz, and Metros 2004). The price of paper, the complications of distribution, the cost of production, and the difficulty of accessing basic knowledge sources for verification all added to the value of the knowledge that had been made into content by being published in a book. Commodification of knowledge became codified in industries like publishing.

We have now entered an era of post-scarcity with regard to information, having somewhere crossed the dividing line between not enough and too much (Rosenzweig 2003). The Internet has rendered useless the gatekeeping techniques by which the publishing industry controlled the creation and dissemination of knowledge for centuries. There are over 150 million Web sites, a number that grows every month (Netcraft 2008), and Web-based how-to lessons cover the gamut from countertop installation to research methods.

This shift impacts everyone whose profession relates to knowledge or learning. Curriculum remains commodified, but in a manner based not on content but, rather, on the ways in which that content is organized and distributed. As Blackmore (2001) argues, "New learning technologies facilitate the commodification of curriculum into consumable 'packages' online and off-campus. For academics, these factors collectively have produced a significant shift in the nature of their work toward 'academic capitalism'" (353). The content from which a given curriculum is selected, once a highly prized and difficult-to-access commodity, has now become something in the way of an overlooked given, almost the oxygen of the education industry.

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