# Endnote Test 1

Consider the rise of the everything store, once known as the Sears catalog, now [Amazon.com](http://amazon.com/).[[1]](#endnote-1) There is nothing particularly remarkable about the idea that people would like access to a wide array of goods, delivered to their homes, at reasonable prices. Jobbers delivered an assortment of goods with non-fixed prices, department stores developed additional inventory and fixed prices (a great improvement over constant negotiation).[[2]](#endnote-2) Grocery stores and discounters appeared not as a paradigm shift, but as a continuation of the same trend. At times, firms might opt for smaller assortments, but this is merely the play of strategy as the desires of the population are neatly mapped by business operations. The future of retail is also the past.

What varies is the vast array of symbolic expressions of these needs, which come through fashions, cuisines, and other cultural codes. Which is not to say that codes do not become an end in themselves, the rich intertextual life of the public is just as real as the physical life. Manuel Delanda recognized this when he juxtaposed two distinct gradients for the legitimation of a state: symbolic and material. A system that provides sustenance with no meaning or intersubjective investment is objectionable, just as a system that has a vast symbolic life with little effect would be an utter failure. Failed symbolic legitimacy can overwhelm physical plenty.

This textbook is not an account of the reasons why jetpack development has been so slow. For the most part these would be effectively explained by elementary physics and engineering. In an article on the topic of jetpacks in The Guardian, Cardiff University Lecturer and science columnist Dean Burnett laid out the key issues with jetpack technology: gravity is a substantial force and most flying machines use properties like aerodynamic lift (wings) to generate enough lift, managing the size and deployment of the engine itself.[[3]](#endnote-3) After all, it is not enough to build an engine that might lift a human successfully, but you need to attach it to a human being. The Evergreen Aviation museum, a world leader in obscure craft which includes the Spruce Goose, features a number of single user escape helicopters. James Bond, eat your heart out. Attaching a thruster to a human body is tricky and we haven't even gotten into special issues in buckle development. Burnett's argument did not hinge on the difficulty in building the machine, but in the fact that it is not desirable. Jetpacks are far more dangerous than bicycles, people would make terrible choices with them, and they would produce vast emissions of greenhouse gasses. You don't want a jetpack -- notice that word: want.

This is the inflection point for our studies of the future. In communication, the question is rarely if something is possible, but if it is probable or desirable. The title is New Media Futures, our subject matter: what are the possible and probable future technologies for the creation of meaning.

## Disciplinary Context

This book was written for use in a broad New Media program based in the Communication Studies tradition. There are a number of disciplinary threads that tie our traditions into their current administrative alignments. The rhetorical wing of communication traces their origins to a walkout from a writing conference. Mass communication research on the other hand would emphasize the role of social research and media studies from the outset of communication.[[4]](#endnote-4) Others would choose moments that resonate with their particular moment of transdisciplinary contact, from art history to sociology. Communication is not an unusual academic field in this sense.

All academic fields depend on a largely arbitrary disciplinary moment, a point where some critical ontological or epistemological choice was made that determines the answers to many subsequent questions. What does that mean? Economists often begin from a disciplinary fable about the rationalization of barter. Sociologists may reduce interactions to the result of a social force. Artists explore the moment of genius where creative energy seemingly appears from nowhere. Psychologists find the core of all behavior in the cognitive structure of the individual with a lurking basis in the brain.

The tighter the story, the more likely your discipline is to have prestige. It is not that these stories are entirely wrong, but that they always necessarily tell part of the story.

Communication is a great field because it is organized around a number of weak stories. At the same time, this is a curse when dealing with organization of the university system. Is communication a point to organize around or a virus that is withering the marrow of disciplinary rigor?

The critical moments for the study of communication would be decisions about people and context (meaning networks and objects), proximal and distant.

1. Derek Thompson, "The History of Sears Predicts Nearly Everything Amazon Is Doing," The Atlantic, September 25, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/09/sears-predicts- amazon/540888/. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space (University of California Press, 1986). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Dean Burnett, "Jetpacks: Here's Why You Don't Have One Dean Burnett," The Guardian, September 23, 2014, sec. Science, https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2014/sep/23/ jetpacks-science-scientists. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. John Peters, "Democracy and Mass Communication Theory: Dewey, Lippmann, Lazarsfeld," Communication 11, no. 3 (1989): 199--220. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)