Connectivism Post

Question:

What are your ideas and perspectives on Harasim's assessment of the future? Are you alarmed? What is the role of government, or can it even have a role? What controls the private sector? Or the public sector? Given current political conditions, could we act responsibly?

My response:

Harasim's (2017) dismissive denouncement of connectivism's approach to modern technology is intriguing. She speaks with a marked disdain regarding its lack of clarity – both when it comes to the learning theories that preceded it, and the theory itself. Given that Harasim's perspectives on connectivism comprise much of my understanding of this "theory," it is likely that my views lack nuance. I do, however, concur with her assertion that a wholesale embrace of technology as superior to human cognition, "replacing even the role of the teacher" (Harasim, 2017, p. 85) feels alarming.

Downes' "techno-utopian" view of "network intelligence as a *neutral* [emphasis added] albeit omnipresent authority that will organize human activities" (Harasim, 2017, p. 99) feels naïve and willfully optimistic. As New York University professor of journalism Charles Seife asserts, the power of digital media and those who control it are not to be underestimated. He rightly acknowledges that our reality can be "manipulated and changed by the will of those who control the social networks that consume our attention, our time and our contact with one another" (Harasim, 2017, p. 100). Perhaps my human understanding limits me, but I struggle to imagine a world in which technology is truly neutral. And, as Harasim asserts, instructional systems owned by self-interested corporations, controlled by complex algorithms, will be nigh-impossible to "question or to understand, much less challenge" (Harasim, 2017, p. 113). It seems inevitable that elite hi-tech corporations will control the narrative and our perceptions of reality if permitted to operate unfettered.

Collaborativism, an alternative learning theory to connectivism, sees technology as a tool that can support humans in "extending and advancing human thinking" (Harasim, 2017, p. 133). From a collaborativist perspective, technology is a tool to augment, not replace, human intelligence. Harasim's (2017) claim that "deep thinking cannot be automated" (p. 140) is a call to capitalize on the possibilities that technology offers, while refusing to allow it to subjugate humanity.

With the rapid growth of powerful tools that can shape minds and communities, it is minimally incumbent upon the government to maintain awareness around "information" to facilitate public communication and clarification. Additionally, those with knowledge and power in the private sector are under ethical obligation, to place safeguards and limitations appropriately. This is a weighty, complicated, and unpredictable topic; I could not possibly claim to know the correct path forward, but an acknowledgement of the dangers, alongside the exciting possibilities, is necessary. With the optimistic tenets of collaborativism to guide us away from the

alarming aspects of a connectivist future, humanity can hope to, not only survive, but benefit from, the advantages of technology.

Reference

Harasim, L. (2017). *Learning theory and online technologies* (2nd Ed.). Routledge.