

## Foreword

As Jonathan Bishop invited me to write this foreword, I had the privilege to dive into the chapters even before the book was published, and maybe even before the authors had the opportunity to read each others' contributions. Being in such a lucky position, I take the opportunity to lead you around in the wider scope of the book.

For about four decades we have welcomed new metaphors for interactive applications at least every three to four years. I think this book offers more than a new metaphoric framework. Its essence is that it is no longer reasonable to regard the virtual and the real as different sides of the same coin. What Jonathan's book shows is that the interactive "application" has taken a leading role in the question on how to address societal and existential issues, not long ago too large concerns to even imagine how media could mitigate between the strict intimate and what we used to call "the collective consciousness."

Let us go through the main topics as reflected in the titles of the chapters. First of all, it is interesting to see that the division in societal sectors like education, care, industry, and entertainment: they do not matter too much; it seems that our current societal needs have washed away our scruples to admit that in essence all these "sectors" cope with the same essential dilemmas and challenges.

1. Relentless optimism and at the same time realism that the human mind can transcend from everyday concerns and feel attached to the big social challenges of today like accepting that thinking about "disabilities" is essential for making progress with the "normal."
2. The awareness that before expecting our neighbours to "awake" from "not in my backyard," we need the harsh side of life, like Jonathan describes in his chapter on the poor boy who was willing to give his life in order to prevent his sister from being raped by their grandpa. Mass media has exploited our weak spot in order to elicit donations. We continue to understand that for conquering abstract concepts like relativity theory or quantum mechanics, a similar condition is needed as well.
3. Bringing "Cognitive Load" and "Empathy" in one sentence together is a big step forward as it confirms that we have been too obsessed in upgrading everyday life phenomena to the level of "cognitive," which pretends to be real, valuable, ubiquitous, and even solemn, like book knowledge tended to be "given by God" himself. We tend to accept now that "cognitive" load is mainly "load," just like "knowledge economy" is mainly "economy." Sweller's theory on cognitive load stems from early ergonomic research that saw systems completely out of balance: too much control for a minor aspect in life. This book launches several chapters that converge in scope. Empathy and later Csikszentmihalyi's notion of "flow" brings us to the acceptance that humans are not just "users," "customers," or "recipients"; the human actor is "actor," "conductor," and creator. The

person who is in a media program is far away from a victim; he or she is a God(ess) who does not spend a second on deciding on how to give attention or leave a certain app; (s)he is just immersed in the sea of recommendations (“likes”) that thousands did a few minutes ago. So, what is in the “cognitive load”? It is no longer an individual concern, as the Social Web did 95% of the filtering by human intelligence just before. In this sense, there is not a huge difference between the filtering process based upon authority and reputation, except that Web applications let thousands of persons play a role in this filtering process instead of two or four in the traditional editorial one.

4. **Gamification:** can we accept it as an antidote for those who suffer from marginal jobs, like the salespersons in exquisite warehouses, playing games to kill the confrontation of being obsolete if no customers are entering or buying? Of course, this painful societal fact of appointing persons to cynical jobs is the serious part of gaming. The game itself is joy, or at least *divertissement*. The other side of gamification is that sectors like escaping from taxpaying provokes a mutual game between the public opinion and the growing power of authorities to data-mine the citizen and “bringing them for justice.” Dimensions like privacy and security will gain more and more momentum, until we admit that the story rather than “the data” are decisive in moral condemnation.
5. **Publishing:** The mere act of publishing has been overlooked in media campaigns; it is the last step before the public gets access to a creation. Shouting on a market square during a mass manifestation can be seen as publication. As long as the surrounding protesters see no conflict with their own message they will assimilate your words and maybe even copy and broadcast your words. Being in the wrong side of the football stadium may cause great problems as shouting few seconds earlier or later may soon lead to be excommunicated or worse. Indeed, the role of publisher stays important, not for the process of multiplication, but in the timing among seasons and the colour of the cover.
6. **Neuroeconomics and rehabilitation:** We may add the phenomenon of neuro-response plasticity; the fact that redundancy is still mentioned as the main role of gray matter, still demonstrates that we have not yet understood how essentially the cortex works autonomously and prepares during sleep. The disbelief that dancing in the school class and gaming before the surgeon enters the real patient gives better results demonstrates that we still carry the older belief that skills need to be compartmentalized (task analytical design) before we know how to train.
7. **Education is still the abstraction from socialisation.** As far as school education is concerned, this is one of the more pervasive attempts to locate the learning at the student, not at the teacher or the administrator. We do not need games in the schools; Students know and feel that there is already a game: to overcome complexity and know what the test will be about.
8. **An enticing perspective is the chapter on “Learning Sociology in a Massively Multi-Student Online Learning Environment.”** Why do we need authors, editors, reviewers, and publishers if the best book on sociology is the blog with real life events and reflections. What authority do students need more? We may see a growing revolt from curricular and assessment designers who have problems to model such rich learning environments as its goals and eminent understanding may shift all the time; If it cannot be assessed, it is no use to learn it.

In summary, this book has opened the new arena for what I would call “critical media reflection.” It goes beyond the scope designers and users; it is all about confronting society with fixations that cause too much frustration and overhead. Please dive into this book and seek contact with the authors

*Piet Kommers*  
*University of Twente, The Netherlands*

**Piet Kommers** is an Associate Professor at the University of Twente, The Netherlands. His specialty is social media for communication and organisation. As Conference Co-Chair of the IADIS Multi-Conference, he initiated the conferences of Web-Based Communities and Social Media, E-Society, Mobile Learning, and International Higher Education. He is Professor at the UNESCO Institute for Eastern European Studies in Educational Technology and Adjunct Professor at Curtin University in Perth, Australia.