

READING TEST 2

Part 5

You are going to read a review of two books about the internet. For questions 31 – 36, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

The internet today

James Baxter reviews two books about the internet: *Rewire* by Ethan Zuckerman, and *Untangling the Web* by Aleks Krotoski.

Open a street map of any city and you see a diagram of all the possible routes one could take in traversing or exploring it. Superimpose on the street map the actual traffic flows that are observed and you see quite a different city: one of flows. The flows show how people actually travel in the city, as distinct from how they could. This helps in thinking about the internet and digital technology generally. In itself, the technology has vast possibilities, as several recent books emphasise, but what we actually wind up doing with it is, at any point in time, largely unknown.

Ethan Zuckerman is excited by the possibilities the web provides for linking far-flung populations, for sampling different ways of life, for making us all digital cosmopolitans. His central thesis, however, is that while the internet does, in principle, enable everyone to become genuinely cosmopolitan, in practice it does nothing of the kind. As the philosopher Anthony Appiah puts it, true cosmopolitanism 'challenges us to embrace what is rich, productive and creative' about differences; in other words, to go beyond merely being tolerant of those who are different. Much of the early part of *Rewire* is taken up with demonstrating the extent to which the internet, and our use of it, fails that test.

'We shape our tools,' said the philosopher Marshall McLuhan, 'and afterwards they shape us.' This adage is corroborated every time most of us go online. We've built information tools (like search and social networking systems) that embody our biases towards things that affect those who are closest to us. They give us the information we think we want, but not necessarily the information we might need.

Despite all the connectivity, we are probably as ignorant about other societies as we were when television and newspapers were our main information sources. In fact, Zuckerman argues, in some ways we were better then, because serious mainstream media outlets saw it as their professional duty to 'curate' the flow of news; there were editorial gatekeepers who determined a 'news agenda' of what was and wasn't important. But, as the internet went mainstream, we switched from curation to search, and the traditional gatekeepers became less powerful. In some respects, this was good because it weakened large multimedia conglomerates, but it had the unanticipated consequence of increasing the power of digital search tools – and, indirectly, the power of the corporations providing them.

Zuckerman – a true cosmopolitan who co-founded a web service dedicated to realising the net's capacity to enable anyone's voice to be heard – provides an instructive contrast to excessively optimistic narratives about the transformative power of networked technology, and a powerful diagnosis of what's wrong. Where he runs out of steam somewhat is in contemplating possible solutions, of which he identifies three: 'transparent translation' – simply automated, accurate translation between all languages; 'bridge figures' – bloggers who explain ideas from one culture to another; and 'engineered serendipity' – basically, technology for enabling us to escape from filters that limit search and networking systems. Eventually, the technology will deliver transparent translation; cloning Ethan Zuckerman would provide a supply of bridge figures, but, for now, we will have to make do with pale imitations. Engineering serendipity, however, is a tougher proposition.

Aleks Krotoski might be able to help. She is a keen observer of our information ecosystem, and has been doing the conference rounds with an intriguing contraption called the 'Serendipity Engine', which is two parts art installation and one part teaching tool. *Untangling the Web* is a collection of 17 thoughtful essays on the impact of comprehensive networking on our lives. They cover the spectrum of stuff we need to think about – from the obvious (like privacy, identity and the social impact of the net) to topics which don't receive enough attention (for example, what medics, with a sniff, call 'cyberchondria' – how the net can increase health anxieties).

Although she's a glamorous media 'star' (having fronted a TV series about the internet), people underestimate Krotoski at their peril. She's a rare combination of academic, geek, reporter and essayist, which her chapter on the concept of friendship online exemplifies: she's read what the key social theorists say on the subject, but she's also alert to what she experiences as 'emotional anaemia' – 'the sense that ... you might not feel the online love from the people you should, because your nearest and dearest may be drowned out in the ocean of sociability.' Which, in a way, brings us back to Zuckerman's thoughts about the difference between what networked technology could do and what it actually does.

- 31 The reviewer starts with the metaphor of a city map in order to illustrate
- A the difficulty in understanding the complexity of the internet.
 - B the degree to which the internet changes as time passes.
 - C the difference between potential and real internet use.
 - D the importance of the internet in people's lives today.
- 32 What do the words 'that test' in line 13 refer to?
- A providing more widespread access to information
 - B connecting in a substantial way with other cultures
 - C establishing principles for developing the internet
 - D accepting that not everyone in the world is the same
- 33 What point is made about the internet in the third paragraph?
- A People often struggle to find what they are looking for on it.
 - B It influences how people relate to family and friends.
 - C All users have some responsibility for its evolution.
 - D The way in which it works is far from neutral.
- 34 What does the reviewer suggest about Zuckerman in the fifth paragraph?
- A His recommendations are less impressive than his analysis.
 - B He uses terms that are harder to understand than need be.
 - C He has the same failings that he identifies in other people.
 - D His account of important developments is too negative.
- 35 Which of the following words is used to suggest disapproval?
- A rounds (line 36)
 - B contraption (line 36)
 - C stuff (line 38)
 - D sniff (line 40)
- 36 What does the reviewer suggest about Aleks Krotoski in the final paragraph?
- A Her insight into the nature of online friendship is perceptive.
 - B She has been influenced by Ethan Zuckerman.
 - C People are often misled by her academic credentials.
 - D She takes on too many different roles.

Part 6

You are going to read extracts from articles in which four academics discuss the contribution the arts (music, painting, literature, etc.) make to society. For questions 37 – 40, choose from the academics A – D. The academics may be chosen more than once.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

The Contribution of the Arts to Society

A Lana Esslett

The arts matter because they link society to its past, a people to its inherited store of ideas, images and words; yet the arts challenge those links in order to find ways of exploring new paths and ventures. I remain sceptical of claims that humanity's love of the arts somehow reflects some inherent inclination, fundamental to the human race. However, exposure to and study of the arts does strengthen the individual and fosters independence in the face of the pressures of the mass, the characterless, the undifferentiated. And just as the sciences support the technology sector, the arts stimulate the growth of a creative sector in the economy. Yet, true as this is, it seems to me to miss the point. The value of the arts is not to be defined as if they were just another economic lever to be pulled. The arts can fail every measurable objective set by economists, yet retain their intrinsic value to humanity.

B Seth North

Without a doubt, the arts are at the very centre of society and innate in every human being. My personal, though admittedly controversial, belief is that the benefits to both individuals and society of studying science and technology, in preference to arts subjects, are vastly overrated. It must be said, however, that despite the claims frequently made for the civilising power of the arts, to my mind the obvious question arises: Why are people who are undeniably intolerant and selfish still capable of enjoying poetry or appreciating good music? For me, a more convincing argument in favour of the arts concerns their economic value. Needless to say, discovering how much the arts contribute to society in this way involves gathering a vast amount of data and then evaluating how much this affects the economy as a whole, which is by no means straightforward.

C Heather Charlton

It goes without saying that end-products of artistic endeavour can be seen as commodities which can be traded and exported, and so add to the wealth of individuals and societies. While this is undeniably a substantial argument in favour of the arts, we should not lose sight of those equally fundamental contributions they make which cannot be easily translated into measurable social and economic value. Anthropologists have never found a society without the arts in one form or another. They have concluded, and I have no reason not to concur, that humanity has a natural aesthetic sense which is biologically determined. It is by the exercise of this sense that we create works of art which symbolise social meanings and over time pass on values which help to give the community its sense of identity, and which contribute enormously to its self-respect.

D Mike Konecki

Studies have long linked involvement in the arts to increased complexity of thinking and greater self-esteem. Nobody today, and rightly so in my view, would challenge the huge importance of maths and science as core disciplines. Nevertheless, sole emphasis on these in preference to the arts fails to promote the integrated left/right-brain thinking in students that the future increasingly demands, and on which a healthy economy now undoubtedly relies. More significantly, I believe that in an age of dull uniformity, the arts enable each person to express his or her uniqueness. Yet while these benefits are enormous, we participate in the arts because of an instinctive human need for inspiration, delight, joy. The arts are an enlightening and humanising force, encouraging us to come together with people whose beliefs and lives may be different from our own. They encourage us to listen and to celebrate what connects us, instead of retreating behind what drives us apart.

Which academic

has a different view from North regarding the effect of the arts on behaviour towards others?

37

has a different view from Konecki on the value of studying the arts compared to other academic subjects?

38

expresses a different opinion to the others on whether the human species has a genetic predisposition towards the arts?

39

expresses a similar view to Esslett on how the arts relate to demands to conform?

40

Part 7

You are going to read an extract from a magazine article about Macquarie Island. Six paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs A – G the one which fits each gap (41 – 46). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

Mark your answers on the separate answer sheet.

Macquarie Island

Journalist Matthew Denholm joins a group of scientists, attempting to save Macquarie Island, which lies halfway between Australia and Antarctica.

I am stumbling, blinded by tiny missiles of ice and snow driven horizontally into my face by a howling gale. One minute I'm blown backwards. The next I'm leaping skyward in undignified panic as a foot narrowly misses an outraged elephant seal. Squinting painfully through torchlight, I've little hope of seeing the beasts.

41

Later, inside a cosy hut, sporting a patch over the sorer of my eyes, I have to admit that it probably is. This is, after all, the sub-Antarctic. Or to be precise, Macquarie Island: a sliver of land conjured abruptly from the vast wilderness of the Southern Ocean. The darkest, coldest months are generally the quietest time of year for human activity here, but this year is different. I'm with a team of scientists who are undertaking a seemingly impossible task: to rid the entire island of every rabbit, rat and mouse.

42

Next morning, I abruptly change my mind, however, when I awake to a view that justifies the three-day voyage to this remote outpost of Australia. After overnight snowfalls the island is painted white, from highland plateaus, with frozen lakes, to rocky black sand and pebble shore. All glistens in rare sub-Antarctic sunshine. Besides, the previous afternoon's discomforts were entirely our own fault.

43

The delay while we doubled back made it impossible to reach the hut before dusk. I had also blundered, deciding snow goggles were unnecessary. We had been taught a valuable lesson. While officially part of Australia, this island is a different world. Different rules apply. Every move must be planned and precautions taken because of the dangers posed by climate and terrain.

44

This extreme isolation means no activity is easy on the island. Our first challenge was getting ashore as there is no safe anchorage. But when we eventually reached the beach, I could instantly see that the island's reputation as 'the Galápagos of the south' is justified. Over the next few days, seals, penguins and a host of seabirds are a constant presence. As in the Galápagos Islands, some species are abundant – there are an estimated 100,000 seals and four million penguins. Though hunted in the past, these days the main threat to the island's fauna comes not from man but from our legacy.

45

Unaccustomed to the herbivores' teeth, the island flora has been overgrazed and reduced to stubble. The hills and plateaus are pock-marked with holes and soft surfaces are undermined by their burrows. On this treeless island, the overgrazing has also left the homes of native birds exposed. Petrel and albatross chicks are thus more vulnerable to predation and the harsh elements. The devastation reached such a point that in 2007 the World Heritage Convention discussed whether the island should lose its World Heritage status.

46

However, the status was also conferred because of its 'outstanding natural beauty and aesthetic importance'. Given that the wild hillsides that should be lushly covered are bare, and are animated not by the movement of wind in tussock but by rabbits running amok, it is not surprising that the world was beginning to ask whether the description still applied.

- A** This is mainly in the form of rabbits. Introduced in 1877 as a food source, they took to the island with gusto. Recent estimates of the rabbit population, before the eradication program began, ranged from 100,000 to 150,000.
- B** It's a realisation that makes all the more impressive the endeavours of the first explorers to come here. Here at Brothers Point, perched on a headland off the island's east coast, we could be the last humans on Earth. In a geographical sense, we very nearly are.
- C** The walk – just under 10km from the research station to the cabin – wasn't meant to be in darkness. Some time after setting out, however, my photographer realised he had left a piece of camera equipment behind.
- D** It's one of the most ambitious programs of its type ever attempted. A worthy project indeed, but as the intense winds rage outside, I can empathise with Captain Douglass, an early visitor to the island. Arriving in 1822, Douglass called Macquarie 'the most wretched place'.
- E** The resultant landslips have devastating consequences. They have harmed hundreds of penguins as well as destroying nesting sites leaving local wildlife at risk. I begin to realise just how damaged this wilderness is.
- F** At night, they are indistinguishable from the rocks that cover the ground; only their gurgling barks tell me when to jump. As I lose feeling in my fingers, numbed by glacial temperatures, I ask myself: Is this what I sailed to the bottom of the world for?
- G** Macquarie achieved the listing 10 years earlier, partly in recognition of the fact that it is a geological freak. The island is ocean floor forced to the surface by the convergence of two tectonic plates – an ongoing process.

