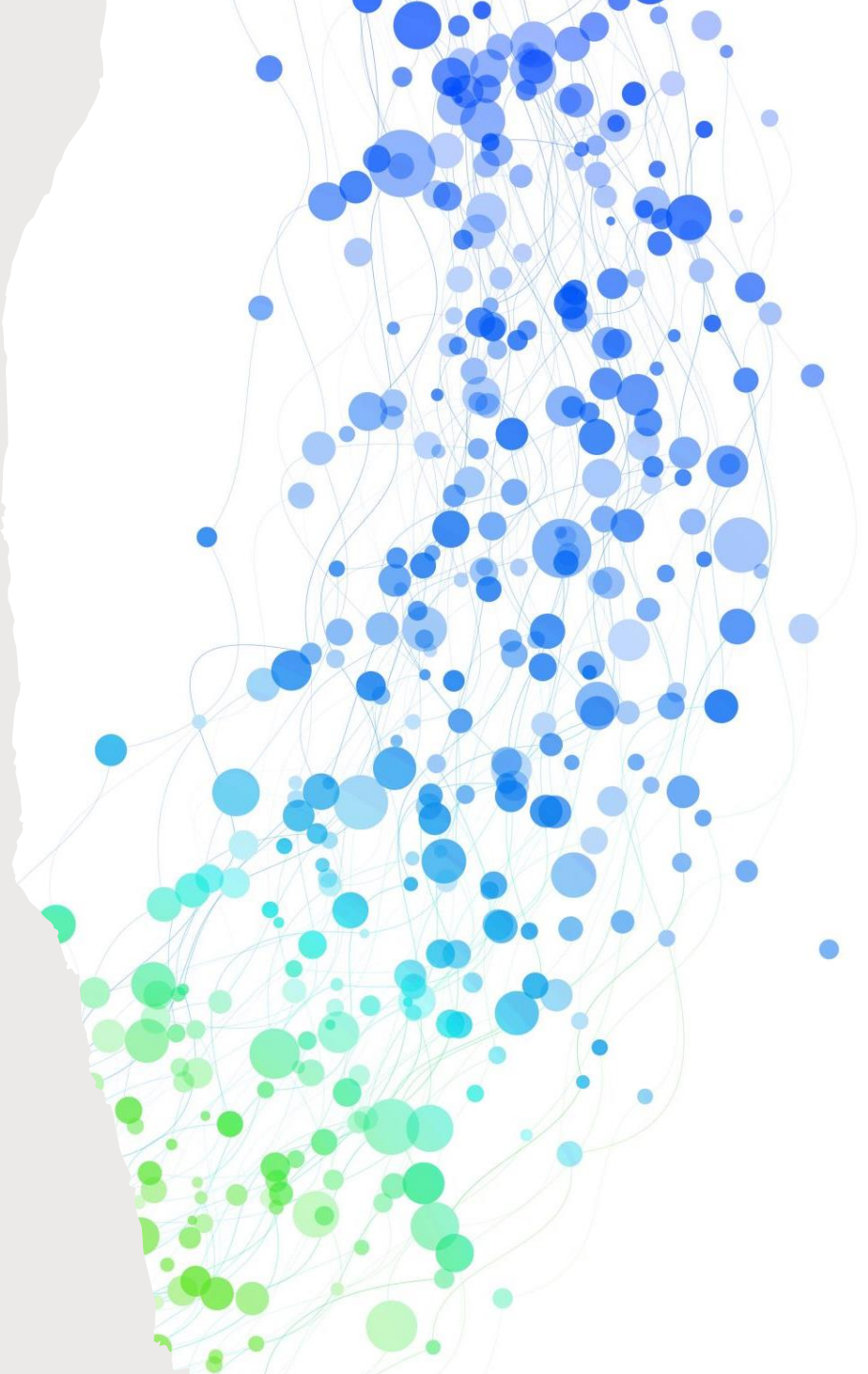
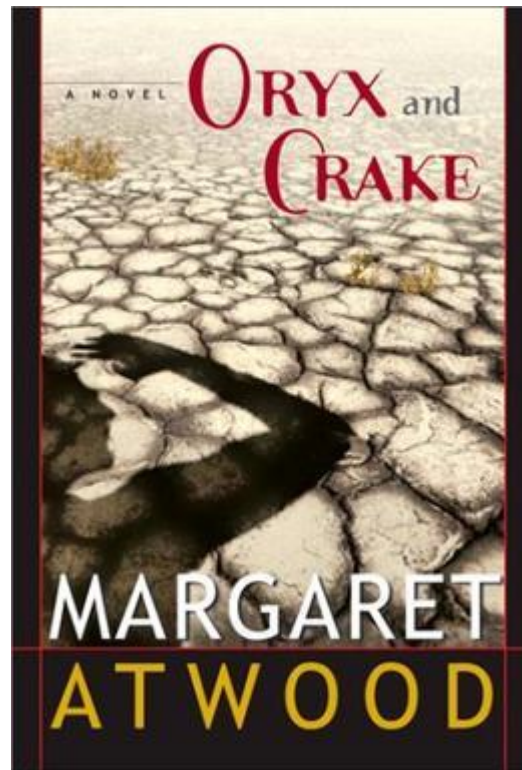


MARGARET ATWOOD'S
ORYX AND CRAKE,
TECHNOLOGICAL
COLONIALISM AND THE
DYSTOPIAN FUTURE
FOR ACADEMIC
LIBRARIES

Blair Kuntz
University of Toronto



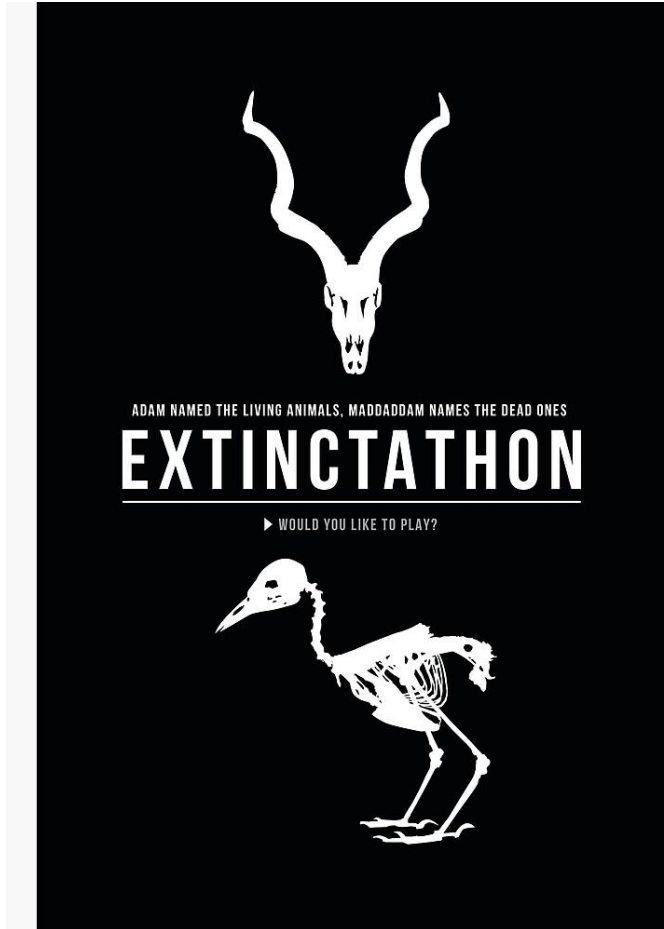
ORYX AND CRAKE (2003)



SNOWMAN AND THE CRAKERS



EXTINCTATHON



PIGOONS



PLEEBLANDS



ARTS ASSIGNED AN INFERIOR ROLE VIS-À-VIS SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

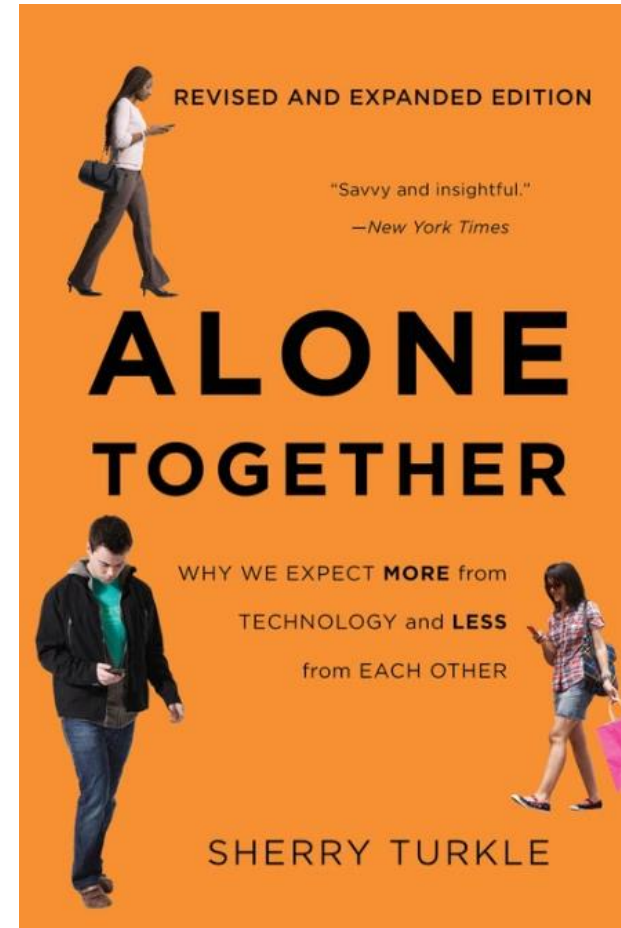
- The move towards reverence for science and technology at the expense of arts and the humanities is apparent in real life.
- Humanities courses in the US constituted 15% of university courses in 1970.
- By 2009-2010, this percentage had shrunk to only 8%.



MONGOLIA

ALONE TOGETHER - SHERRY TURKLE (2011)

- Reliance on digital resources is leading to a world in which we care more about our technologies than we do about each other.



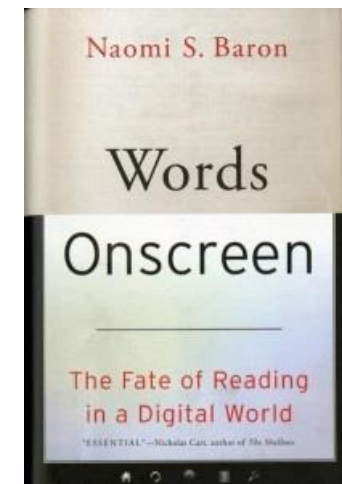
“IS GOOGLE MAKING US STUPID?” BY NICHOLAS CARR (2008)

“I’m not thinking the way I used to think. I can feel it most strongly when I am reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration starts to drift after two or three pages.”



WORDS ONSCREEN BY NAOMI S. BARON (2015)

- Dumbing down of scholarly research.
- 46% of citations from student papers were from the first page of the source.
- Only 23% were from the second page.
- 77% of citations were from the first three pages of the article.
- Increased use of skimming; only 16% read word by word.



DO READERS PREFER EBOOKS OVER PRINT?

- A 2013 study indicated that when reading for pleasure, print was the clear choice.
- Readers remember more when they read print.
- Overwhelming choice was for reading the hard copy for both academic and pleasure reading.
- “Digital reading tends to be fast reading, which is useful for finding information, but often superficial” and not conducive to abstract thought – Researcher Antonio Tombolini.

TECHNOLOGICAL REPRESSION VIA ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN LIBRARIES

- Library robotics. Robots can work forever without getting tired.
- AI envisaged for descriptive cataloging, subject indexing, reference services, technical services, shelf-reading, collection development and information retrieval systems.
- Proponents say that AI will free up time for librarians to devote to other duties.
- However, what if library administrators decide that AI is simply cheaper, even though the service is inferior to humans.

ATLAS OF AI (2021) BY KATE CRAWFORD

- Juxtaposes AI with the exploitation of natural resources such as lithium, fuel, the Amazon warehouse, and the exploitation of human labor.
- Human minds are not computers.
- Facial recognition is prone to error.
- No evidence that a person's emotions can be read from someone's face.
- What about library surveillance?
- Does artificial intelligence make it easier to view borrowing history or what ebooks a patron has read online?



WHAT IF?

“Every novel begins with a what if? And then carefully sets forth its maxims. The what if of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, What if we continue down the road we’re already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who’s got the will to stop us?”

Margaret Atwood



WHAT IF?

- What if instead of promoting greater literacy, technology promotes a society which takes more and comfort in mindless escapism?
- What if technology is used to benefit wealthy countries at the expense of the rest of the world?
- What if technology is used in destructive instead of beneficial ways?
- What if instead of promoting freedom the new technologies are used as tools of censorship (i.e. Google search algorithms which demote unconventional viewpoints lower down the list or the current bans of Facebook and Twitter users who do not agree with these companies' ideological framework)?
- What if we are fowling our own nest and technology will not save us?