

Worlds Fall Apart: Education and Enshitification

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The ongoing debate over the implementation of generative AI in education highlights the need for deeper reflection on the purposes of education. Using Cory Doctorow's concept of "enshitification"—which describes the decay of internet platforms as they exploit users—I draw an analogy to education and develop enshitification as a third way worlds come to an end. I claim that the rapid integration of AI into educational settings represents the final stage of education's enshittening. In such a demise, the focus shifts from meaningful world-building to mere outcomes and self-perpetuation, revealing the abandonment of education's world-building purpose. In this scenario, enshittened education becomes a self-cannibalizing system devoid of purpose, meaning, and world-building. Turning toward a constructive conclusion, I consider Doctorow's four constraints—competition, regulation, self-help, and labour—for preventing enshitification as necessary conditions for the continuation of education and our worlds. With this, I argue that the purpose of education is worlds: their construction and their maintenance; yet I question whether we still value education enough to preserve it and whether we love our worlds enough to prevent their demise.

Worlds Fall Apart

AI will save us (News, 2024; TED, 2023). AI will kill us all (Marlo, 2023; Purser, 2025; Rosario, 2025). It is into this milieu of techno-utopianism and moral panic that I pause to consider the rapid implementation of AI into educational contexts. The way by which I develop my position is through the construction of an argument that entails two intents. The first intent of the paper is to describe a third form of world demise in education, and the second intent is to once again bring to the fore deeper reflection on the purposes of education. Bringing these two intents together, I argue that those engaged in education have lost their way, and the cultivation of worlds must take central precedence in educational praxis and theorization. I begin the paper by attending to the first intent. I therefore introduce how education relates to my use of "worlds," and then delineate two ways in which worlds can meet their demise. From there, I turn to Cory Doctorow's concept of "enshitification" and develop it as a third way worlds come to an end, specifically theorized in relation to the rapid implementation of generative AI in educational settings. Developing the second intent of the paper, I continue by arguing that this third form of world demise (enshitification) reveals a discarding of the world-building purpose of education and instead perpetuates a self-cannibalizing logic. Turning toward a constructive conclusion, I consider Doctorow's four constraints for preventing enshitification as necessary conditions for the continuation of education and our worlds.

Worlds and their Demises

To begin, I must note off the top that “world” here is not synonymous with “earth” or “planet.” “World” is taken up as an onto-epistemological construction that occurs at the intersection of mind-matter-becoming. One way to parse this distinction is to say a world is what we live *in* as humans, whereas the category of the planet or the earth we might say we live *on* (that is, if I were to attempt to explain it through a fairly common Western mode of existence that retains a subject-object distinction of discrete entities). As an onto-epistemic construction, there is not a singular world universally shared by humans, though we share one planet. Instead, humans occupy many worlds, worlds shared with different and multiple groups. These worlds differ and overlap and can be conceptualized as multicentric, both in terms of sites of knowledge generation and in terms of multi-centric knowledges within a person (Krabbe, 2025). By using “worlds” in the plural, I notably depart from using the particular term “world” as developed by Hannah Arendt to indicate the constructed and singular world-of-things that is shared between “men” (sic), and which is viewed and known through a plurality of perspectives (Arendt, 1998). Insofar as worlds are constructed, I am not here pursuing an objectivist world/planet “out there” nor am I advocating a naïve constructivism whereby worlds are created *ex nihilo*, merely manifested from thin air. Instead, I understand worlds as constructed and lived in—cultivated and transmitted, passed on and revised, dwelt in and renovated, shaped by us and also shaping us. Education is one of the ways this construction, cultivation, and transmission of worlds may occur, insofar as education can be conceived as a change that occurs in a liminal space between one’s already existing world(s) and one’s imagination (Krabbe, 2023). Education, conceptualized in relation to worlds, is therefore an ongoing process of world creation, cultivation, and continuation. Education in this sense is quite far removed from reductionist articulations of education that reduce it to skill attainment, training, content transmission, capacity building, or even more robust theories of education, such as the cultivation of persons or character formation.

While it may be tempting to start with the creation of worlds as our educational task in the face of challenges or crises, here I propose that first attention ought to be paid to the ending of worlds. For we are never without our worlds, and so we are never starting from scratch. In educational literatures there have been a number of proposals for understanding the ending of a world or worlds. Here, I will briefly mention two types, to which I am adding a third.

The first type of world demise I call world death. This is the seemingly complete foreclosing of the future of a world. Examples of this would be occasions of epistemicide, where the knowing of a people group is “killed” or “dies out” either from exterior force against the epistemic content through systematic devaluing, erasure, and destruction of knowledge systems or the physical deaths of a people group. World death, as the name is intended to invoke, is an egregious assault on a world and all the people who live in that world. In the Canadian context, one can think of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s finding that Canada committed “cultural genocide” as an attempt at enacting world death for many indigenous communities on northern Turtle Island. The specific language used in the report is illustrative of the totality of destruction intended and is therefore helpful in understanding the scope of onto-epistemic destruction necessary to occur for world death to be fully enacted. The report states:

Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. (Kanada, 2015, p. 5).

In the Canadian context, while the offence of cultural genocide was committed by the government of Canada, it was not successfully enacted, and so while many indigenous communities were significantly harmed, their worlds were not fully put to death. While the report uses the term “cultural,” the description of what all is entailed (land, language, institutions, spirituality, and family) assists in rounding out a description of all that world death encompasses.

The second type of world demise is that of world decay. Within educational theory, there is perhaps no more popular understanding of world decay than Hannah Arendt’s articulation of it in her essay “The Crisis in Education.” To understand world decay, it is perhaps best to quote Arendt’s conclusion of that essay at length. She writes:

What concerns us all and cannot therefore be turned over to the special science of pedagogy is the relation between grown-ups and children in general or, putting it in even more general and exact terms, our attitude toward the fact of natality: the fact that we have all come into the world by being born and that this world is constantly renewed through birth. Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world (Arendt, 2006, p. 193).

Arendt’s conservative impulse here reminds us that there is not merely the absolutism of world death. For Arendt, there is also a form of what I call world decay that is related to the fact of natality and our own mortality. Education, for Arendt, is always engaged in a conservative-generative relation to this world-decay.¹ Education is both a preservation and a renewal task which enables life to continue in a common world. The role of transmission is especially highlighted by the fact of natality and thus the importance of maintaining a common world, and this maintaining is supplemented by the renewing act, or, if we are thinking of it institutionally, the reforming act. Thus, the educational task of preventing the decay of worlds is multifaceted, as it entails welcoming into worlds, transferring those worlds forward in time through cultivating a maintenance imagination, and also the renewing and reforming task of imagining and undertaking something new. Yet, in that pursuit of something new—an essential aspect preventing world decay—there is a risk, a risk that has gone awry and availed yet another way in which worlds can meet their demise.

World Enshitification

It is with these two forms of world demise in mind—world death and world decay—I now turn to the focus of my paper: world enshitification.² It is in our current moment that this third dynamic of foreclosure of worlds requires our further attention.

¹ Alfred North Whitehead has a very similar idea in his metaphysics, specifically relating to experience and thinking, that of perpetual perishing (Whitehead, 1978, p. 29).

² A note on shit. I am indebted to my colleague James McKinnon for pressing the “shit” aspect for the metaphor. He was apt in noting that “shit” as a term signifies differently in late capitalist and bourgeois culture as compared to early modern popular culture, and that it is only in the former that shit connotes strongly as negative, whereas those more connected to the land and agriculture are more aware of the fertilization, composting, and regeneration. Furthermore, McKinnon also aptly noted the Latinate prefixes and suffixes of enshitification that have themselves so often enshitified English terms such as “shit” with its Anglo-Saxon/Dutch/Germanic/Frisian roots. (*Shit - Etymology, Origin & Meaning*, n.d.). While these reflections on the language and usage of shit are important, I here do not press the enshitification metaphor in this way. Rather, I use it in its more narrow, crass, and intentionally offensive manner, which, I would contend, is consistent with Doctorow’s usage of it.

Briefly stated, what I mean by world enshitification is a process in which the demise of worlds does not occur through force, physical violence, and death *or* through neglect and intention due to a lack of love, but rather the demise of a world occurs through intentional substitution of values and practices until the world that once was is transformed into a refuse pile that barely retains a relation to its former self. I suggest here that a pertinent lens into this dynamic is that of information technology, from which I borrow the term “enshitification.” “Enshitification” is a word of our zeitgeist illustrated by Australia’s Macquarie Dictionary naming it as 2024’s word of the year (*Australia’s Macquarie Dictionary Picks ‘Enshitification’ as Word of 2024*, n.d.). By way of utilizing this concept, the mode of analysis I undertake is to expose and clarify through intensification. Rather than bemoaning an over-technological situation by drawing contrasts to idyllic pre-technological situations—a method plagued by the dilemma of infinite regress to a time before the use of fire for cooking—I utilize a concept actively being put to use in current debates regarding the internet to think through the current moment in educational settings (*Understood*, n.d.).

The current moment to which I refer is one steeped in utopian discussions of the implementation of generative artificial intelligence in educational settings. For example, the World Economic Forum has been parroting the techno-futurist utopia offered by Silicon Valley (*From Virtual Tutors to Accessible Textbooks*, 2024). While at the same time, educators wallow in uncertainty regarding how to proceed in implementing AI, let alone knowing how to proceed in the process of education and schooling impacted by this implementation. For example, early uptake of AI has been hindered by teachers feeling like they have more pressing issues that require their focus, and they also self-report that they do not know how to use AI (Langreo, 2024). It is this distinctly varied affective terrain that has yielded many articulations that we as educators are entering “uncharted educational terrain” (Tucker, 2024). I contend, however, that rather than being in uncharted terrain, educators are merely being thrown, yet again, into necessary reflections on the purposes of education. I will argue in the remainder of this paper that the educational challenges posed by generative AI are mis-approached if considerations of creation, love, decay, and destruction are not foregrounded. I will make this argument by applying Cory Doctorow’s concept of enshitification to education, specifically related to the arrival and integration of generative AI, and arguing that the enshitification of education is a third type of world demise.

Enshitification, as coined and developed by Doctorow, is a theory of how internet platforms die (Doctorow, 2022). Doctorow summarizes the process as: “First, [internet platforms] are good to their users; then they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers; finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then, they die” (Doctorow, n.d.). In short, Doctorow has proposed a diagnosis for why the internet is so miserable currently by providing a typology of the life cycle of internet platforms. One aspect of Doctorow’s diagnosis that is of interest, however, is that the “death” at the end of the life cycle does not mean a permanent end. For example, in many ways Facebook has already enshitified and died, but it is able to persist for an extended period in an enshitified state. This perpetuation of an enshitified state is one aspect of enshitification that distinguishes it from biological metaphors like life cycle. Enshitification differs significantly from biological death in that it is not inevitable, nor a mere “force of history, nor a consequence of “network effect,” rather, Doctorow argues, “the Great Enshittening is the result of specific policy choices, made in living memory, by named individuals, who were warned at the time that this would happen, and they did it anyway” (Doctorow, 2025). Due to its non-inevitability world-enshitification differs from world-decay—which is in part inevitable due to the fact of natality—and also differs from world-death in that it is not final. Yet world-enshitification is similar to world-decay in its gradual occurrence, and shares with world-death the intentional actions of specific people and policies.³

³ I am not here claiming that all cases of world-death require their primary cause to be intentional choices of people or policies, for example the case of Pompeii may be understood as an instance of world-death due to natural disaster, a case where policy and intentional actions of people (though perhaps present in the building of a city near a volcano) do not seem to be the main contributing factor of world-death in that instant.

I do not merely mean to apply enshittification to AI, higher education (as has been done by Ioannis Glinavos (2024)), or school. Rather, my argument is that the frenetic integration of AI into educational settings exemplifies the final stage of the enshittification of education itself.⁴ In this sense, I am expanding on what Doctorow has subsequently called the “enshittocene”⁵ wherein the enshittening moves beyond platform decay to theorize more broadly a (corporate) practice that occurs when there is a loss of constraints. Here in the concept of the enshittocene, the logic of enshittification becomes more explicit and pronounced. By this, I mean that the phenomena experienced by many as the devolution of internet platforms is traced to an underlying logic of a corporate practice, typified by a loss of connection to necessary conditions for internet platforms to remain good to their users. According to Doctorow, the necessary conditions for preventing enshittification are constraints. The fourfold constraints that are lost, as identified by Doctorow, are: competition, regulation, self-help (i.e. the ability to practice alternatives), and workers (Doctorow, 2024b).⁶ I will return to these four constraints below as potential guidance for re-engaging the perennial question of the purposes of education.

The way I apply the analogy of enshittification to education is to think of education and the worlds education creates and upholds as the “users,” we (teachers, administrators, students, etc.) are the platform managers, and the platforms are our educational settings. Thus, those of us engaged in education, were at one time (please permit me a bit of licence to indulge in nostalgia, as a means of dreaming utopia to enable critique) good to education. We valued it, we saw its uses and innate goodness, we enjoyed the worlds it had the possibility and power to create. Then we became allured not by the worlds that were possible to create, but by the byproducts that were also possible through education: wealth, prestige, and

⁴ While I periodize the moment as an end stage, others who are also critical of technological utopianism in education may see the excitement and integration as the first stage in an oft-repeated pattern. For example, the “hype, hope, disappointment” cycle (Selwyn, 2022).

⁵ (Doctorow, 2024b)

⁶ To expound at length:

First: competition. Companies that fear you will take your business elsewhere are cautious about worsening quality or raising prices.

Second: regulation. Companies that fear a regulator will fine them more than they expect to make from cheating, will cheat less.

These two forces affect all industries, but the next two are far more tech-specific.

Third: self-help. Computers are extremely flexible, and so are the digital products and services we make from them. The only computer we know how to make is the Turing-complete Von Neumann machine, a computer that can run every valid program.

That means that users can always avail themselves of programs that undo the anti-features that shift value from them to a company’s shareholders. Think of a board-room table where someone says, ‘I’ve calculated that making our ads 20% more invasive will net us 2% more revenue per user.’

In a digital world, someone else might well say ‘Yes, but if we do that, 20% of our users will install ad-blockers, and our revenue from those users will drop to zero, forever.’

This means that digital companies are constrained by the fear that some enshittificatory maneuver will prompt their users to google, ‘How do I disenshittify this?’

Fourth and finally: workers. Tech workers have very low union density, but that doesn’t mean that tech workers don’t have labor power. The historical “talent shortage” of the tech sector meant that workers enjoyed a lot of leverage over their bosses. Workers who disagreed with their bosses could quit and walk across the street and get another job—a better job.

They knew it, and their bosses knew it. Ironically, this made tech workers highly exploitable. Tech workers overwhelmingly saw themselves as founders in waiting, entrepreneurs who were temporarily drawing a salary, heroic figures of the tech mission.

That’s why mottoes like Google’s ‘don’t be evil’ and Facebook’s ‘make the world more open and connected’ mattered: they instilled a sense of mission in workers. It’s what Fobazi Ettarh calls ‘vocational awe,’ or Elon Musk calls being ‘extremely hardcore.’ (Doctorow, 2024a).

power. In short: allured not by a world but by outcomes. The turn to outcomes had its own consequences and challenges. Gert Biesta, for one, has noted that this change within educational theory towards outcomes has increasingly directed educational institutions and educational practice toward the production of things, be they character traits or competencies, and thus becomes a process of objectification, and demands of students a self-objectification (Biesta, 2021, p. vii). Worlds were replaced by things, constructing efficiencies and “wealth” for the “business interests,” even as they commodified the very selves of the platform managers (aka: students, teachers, and administrators).

Now, with the rapid implementation of generative AI into educational settings, we enter the third stage of the enshittening of education. In this stage, one outcome—the tool of generative AI—and the values and policies that serve it are reabsorbed into the platform (our educational settings). These settings shape the worlds we live within and structure the horizons of our imagination and thereby education itself. The platform managers (i.e. us: teachers, administrators, students, etc.) become participants in upholding the new logics of the changed platform/educational setting. Through this, we, as platform managers, cannibalize ourselves and our platforms (educational settings) into a future where generative AI writes and grades its own assignments (this is not a speculative dystopia; it already occurs following the use of tools developed in the wake of programs like Turnitin). The outside users (i.e. education, and our worlds) have become somewhat trapped as unwilling participants in the platform and its management (that is, by our educational settings and our educators’, administrators’, and students’ use of them). In this cannibalization, both the worlds made possible through education and even the outcomes previously prized are dismissed or forgotten, and ultimately churned back into the vacuous process. It is in this final stage that the enshitocene will have come to education itself. Enshittened education will be its own mirage, wherein there is no outside, no worlds, not even outcomes, merely a Windigo-like⁷ perpetuation of life-long-learning conducted by and for itself: a Windigo’ed education, an enshittened education.

Enshittened Education

Whether the windigo has arrived primarily because of greed or weakness is perhaps worthy of debate, but at the same time is of little importance when faced with the proximity of its infecting spirit. For the future brought by the windigo of enshitification is one in which worlds end not only through intentional destruction or neglect, but through an ongoing substitution of values and practices until a world that once was is transformed into a refuse pile that retains a relation to its former self only in its excrementality. Excremental education, in this sense, will of course contain much of the same “matter,” but its very being and becoming will have been self-cannibalized, leaving behind nothing more than a drifting prowling spirit ready to selfishly enshitify something else that comes along in its moment of weakness.⁸

An aspect of enshittened education that warrants further consideration at this point is that it may still resemble—at least in certain ways—education, and be practiced in educational settings by students, teachers, and administrators. To consider it further, I here turn to a self-described “catastrophe theory for a hyper-modern culture and society which is imploding into the seductive simulacra of its own dark, and negative, sign,” that is, the text: *The Postmodern Scene: Excremental Culture and Hyper Aesthetics* (1987). Arthur Kroker and David Cook offer an insightful scatological reading of Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994), in which the simulacra is not merely a meaningless copy of a copy on its decline to a

⁷ “A windigo (or wendigo) is a supernatural being belonging to the spiritual traditions of Algonquian-speaking First Nations in North America. Windigos are described as powerful monsters that have a desire to kill and eat their victims. In most legends, humans transform into windigos because of their greed or weakness. Various Indigenous traditions consider windigos dangerous because of their thirst for blood and their ability to infect otherwise healthy people or communities with evil. Windigo legends are essentially cautionary tales about isolation and selfishness, and the importance of community.” (Kimmerer, 2013; Pitt, 2012)

⁸ The prowling spirit is adapted from the definition of a Windigo (Pitt, 2012).

state of pure simulacra, but one in which the excremental excess becomes self-perpetuating. Excrement is, of course, not absent from Baudrillard's work, wherein he notably links excrement to Disney's mental effect on the culture, or even identifies that one's entire body can be the squandered excess⁹ that is the remainder (Bataille, 2007; Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 13, 148). Yet, unlike the latent excess in Baudrillard's theorization, Kroker and Cook press the Batailleian excremental excess further, specifically in relation to art. For Bataille, art was already one form of luxury derived from economic excess. Art was, therefore, what was supposed to challenge the exchange principle by being a commodity-form *par excellence* and having no use-value (Kroker & Cook, 1987, p. 18). With the estheticized phase of commodification, Kroker and Cook argue that instead of art being generated as a luxurious end of an excess, now "Art is the highest stage of capital in its fully estheticized phase; and art reinforces capital by transforming the commodity-form into a purely self-referential and excessive site of power" (Kroker & Cook, 1987, p. 19). Thus, what was once thought to be an end is already being reabsorbed, creating a new economy of estheticized shit.

To follow this line of thinking in relation to the enshitification of education argument I have been putting forward, the simulacra of education produced through enshitification—which arrives in full force with the rapid implementation of generative AI—is not merely shitty because of its veneer of being mechanistic and artificial that hides its human based theft and exploitation, though such may be the first simulacra (which is truly problematic because mechanistic shit is not even compostable). Rather, the simulacrum of education is shitty because it is the very art of education that is enshitified. The very excess that makes education beautiful, imaginative, and world-building has become absorbed and enshitified. Long gone are the days when education occurring in the school was that of the leisure of the *scholē*, and now it seems that what art was left in education, whether it be in the teaching and the cultivation of imagination or in the beauty of the worlds education sought, is at risk of becoming reduced to a self-referential and excessive site of mere technique.

Even optimistic accounts of integrating AI into education do not seem to avoid the production of simulacra of education resembling such estheticized shit. For example, the extended (27-minute) paid advertisement by IBM that features Malcome Gladwell in podcast format argues that generative AI assistants can enhance education by transforming teacher training (*How AI Assistants Can Transform Education | Smart Talks | IBM*, 2025). Generative AI, the argument goes, is not meant to enable student cheating but rather to provide training experiences for teacher candidates so they can become better at responsive teaching. Rather than more contact time with students and supervision by a seasoned educator to shape the teacher's educational imagination, these roles in the altered platform/educational setting can, it is argued, be handled by AI chatbots, enabling teacher candidates to spend more time practicing responsive instruction. In such a simulacrum of educator engagement, the art of responding in a moment to a student (a response-moment of education that occurs through the imaginative application of a desired future world for the student) is replicated to overcome the constraint of time and thereby reduces the interaction of "responsiveness" to mere technique. Technique is highlighted and drawn out in the advertisement through an analogy: AI chatbots are like an automatic pitching machine, a machine that enables the teacher to work on perfecting their "swing." Technique is, of course, needed for artistic creation, but insofar as technique replaces the art of education by reducing education to the perfecting of technique, the result is the shitting out of a mechanistic aesthetic "art" rather than education.

Windigos, self-objectification, excremental education, prowling spirits, self-cannibalization, simulacra, and estheticized mechanistic shit!

Ok, but really, is rapidly integrating generative AI into educational settings as bad as all that?

One might reasonably counter at this point that I am being hyperbolic and instead claim that the development of generative AI is not really that bad for educators and education.

⁹ Here Baudrillard is thinking with George Bataille's general economy wherein there is an excess that must be spent (Bataille, 2007).

“Please,” my reasoned objector might say, “consider the 2024 Government of Canada report on jobs and AI compatibility.” The report indicated that teaching is one of the occupational sectors that are more complementary with AI (*Experimental Estimates of Potential Artificial Intelligence Occupational Exposure in Canada*, n.d.; Government of Canada, 2024; Marfo, 2024). “We’re not software engineers (who have already seen job postings plummet (*Software Development Job Postings on Indeed in Canada*, 2025), nor are educators part of the high-exposure low-complementarity occupations with generative AI, such as business, finance, retail, and sales! Things will be fine; it will all be all right. We just need to adapt.” My objector may protest.

As always, individuated and whataboutism logic can always show how something will be worse elsewhere for other people. But to follow that train of thought would be to lose sight of what I have been arguing toward.

Enshittification of education seems to be upon us, and the problem is not a loss of educator jobs.

I do not want to be called the boy who cried wolf, as there are numerous historical examples of lamenting various crises in education. Above, I have even positively referred to one such articulation: Arendt’s essay. The wolf is not generative AI; it alone does not bring about the enshittocene.

At this point, I note that enshittification is, of course, not only advanced in educational settings (platforms) by generative AI, but it may also be propelled by other underthought and self-delusional “educational” choices. Choices which I will categorize as “we thought it sounded like a good idea” decisions. While many such decisions may be put forward, I will merely give one example to illustrate how such decisions propel the enshittification of education. The example comes from one of the contexts wherein I engage in educational practice. This context is one in which the university has spent the last number of years and reportedly \$336 million on replacing its student services, payroll, and HR platforms with a new Workday platform (long gone are the days of course calendars and paper-based course registration) (Sangar, 2020). It has been a decision and implementation which has negatively impacted the educational experiences of students, teachers, and administrators (Cilliers, 2024; Nadalini, 2024). Here again, the devolution of experience is evident in educational settings. But it is not only the experience that is affected, as decisions surrounding course delivery, registration, and communication to students are now laced with murmurs of whether Workday will “allow for us” to do so, or “can Workday do that?” Thus, the “good decision” now has many downstream ramifications, some of which include the curtailing of educational possibilities. In this example, two related aspects of enshittification of education are present. First, the educational experience has been negatively affected by changes in the educational setting. This negative experience in the educational setting/platform then conditions the affective mood (frustration) of the platform managers (students, teachers, and administrators) as they attempt to engage in education. Second, the implementation of the new Workday platform altered the educational setting, such that the platform managers (most notably teachers) have curtailed horizons of possibility for course delivery, registration, etc., thereby limiting offerings and the possible worlds that may be approached through education. Both these aspects illustrate how the integration of different values and policies into the educational setting has downstream effects on education itself through limiting/curtailing/shaping the horizon of possibility and imagination through which education occurs, and worlds are built.

Constraining Enshittification and its Violence

Enshittification as a process, if its dynamic/form is assessed as separate from the content (rapid integration of AI), is a process that may be described as a world logic becoming solipsistic. The logic of a world (for Doctorow, the world, we might say, is internet platforms) becomes so insular, cyclical, and repetitive (even if that repetition is an endlessly linear algorithmically generated feed), that a world begins to consume itself/enshittify. The enshittocene, then, as mentioned above, is an era defined by the ubiquity of this solipsistic logic in our worlds.

The violence of world-enshittification is thus different from the banality of evil described by Arendt, in which merely following directions orchestrates immense harm (Arendt, 2006), or from liberal

conceptions of violence that require an individual agent to exercise physical force with the intent to inflict harm (Vorobej, 2016, p. 3). The violence of world-enshittification can result from well-intentioned actions and policy changes that are ill-conceived and inflict harm by creating a perpetual state of misery that does not cease. These enshittened worlds persist in a state somewhat akin to a perpetual purgatory (in its worst sense of limbo/repetition seemingly without escape), yet one in which that death-without-death is at the same time, frenetic, consuming, purposeless, and self-consumingly solipsistic, and at the same time windigo-like in its consumption of others in its proximity.

It is in contrast to such solipsism that I propose we can make sense of the necessary conditions for education and worlds. To reiterate the necessary conditions to prevent an enshittening, outlined by Doctorow, are the fourfold constraints: competition, regulation, self-help (i.e. the ability to practice alternatives), and workers (Doctorow, 2024b). I proposed above that these constraints can assist us, the platform managers, in directing us back towards more fulsome consideration of the users—that is, education itself and worlds. The necessary constraints are reminders of two related things: plurality and alternatives. Stated differently, there are other worlds to be, and we can choose to be in service of those.

As Doctorow has continued to refine his argument, he has more recently named the four constraints as “competition, regulation, labor power and interoperability” (Doctorow, 2025). These constraints are not merely attempts at restraining bad individual actions; instead, these constraints are necessary conditions for preventing the enshittocene, in that “As these constraints fell away, the environment became *enshittogenic*: rather than punishing enshittification, it rewarded it” (Doctorow, 2025). Thus, without the constraints, a positive feedback loop of enshittening begins.

Though the terms have changed slightly, the thrust of the argument remains: internal resistance is needed, and external alternatives must be created. Internal resistance to world-enshittification can occur when the labour power of the platform managers (educators, students, and administrators) is brought together to push back against the types of decision-making and policy-setting that substitute values. These labour actions must be supported by regulation, specifically governmental regulations, that retain a broad vision of the public good (here, one might say that function is accomplished by a hope that another world is possible), in which educational settings are protected such that educational practice can exude freedom and imagination, not mere technique. Labour power and regulation aid in developing and protecting the external alternatives, which are further enabled by competition (here, competition of worlds in which to participate) and the interoperability of education.

The competition between available worlds directly challenges the solipsism of enshittification, and it is through the risk of education’s interoperability that the continued creation of worlds can occur. Doctorow has stated that “Interoperability has long been technology’s most important disenshittifier” (Doctorow, 2025). This is paradoxical because “Interoperability is at the center of the enshittification story because interop is an unavoidable characteristic of anything built out of computers. Computers are, above all else, *flexible*. . . [and] Enshittification runs on that flexibility. . . But that flexibility cuts both ways” (Doctorow, 2025). The same technology in computers that enabled the social aspect of early internet forums also enabled the creation of solipsistic echo chambers in algorithmic (social) media. For those engaged in education, interoperability should sound familiar. Education is, like computers, interoperable; it can be flexible (even if that flexibility is to its own detriment). Education can create worlds, and yet it can also produce more narrow outcomes (like generative AI) that, when rapidly integrated into the educational setting, can produce solipsistic feedback loops. Doctorow (2025) argues that the interoperability of computers must be exercised to put them to use in non-enshittifying ways. So too, those involved in educational settings must also be flexible and put education to use in flexible ways, so education can be different, and our worlds can be different.

It is with attention to the plurality of worlds that the purpose of education I have laced through this entire paper becomes most clear. The purpose of education I have been, and am, arguing for is worlds: their construction and their maintenance. While other purposes of education are also laudable, such as self-cultivation, civic responsibility, skill attainment, critical thinking, these purposes are also complemented by a suite of education-related purposes that are perhaps less clearly laudable; such as,

workforce preparation, adaptive conformation, integrating into collectivities, social directiveness, streaming and differentiating, and the propaedeutic function of selecting and training a ruling elite (Gatto, 2003). Given the variety of these other purposes, here I tentatively propose that these purposes ought to be negotiated and contested in light of their service to worlds and therefore ought not to be taken up as ends in themselves. This framing of the purpose of education as worlds, in their plurality, in order to resist a solipsistic enshittened demise, directs me back to questions I imagine Arendt posing in relation to world decay, but applying them instead as responses to enshittification logics.

Will we love worlds enough to educate in order to resist their demise? (Arendt, 2006)

And furthermore, will we love the students, topics, and ourselves enough?

And finally, will we love the planet enough to permit it to sustain our worlds?

Love, of course, is not a silver bullet that will end the enshittification of education, for the problem of world-enshittification is not that of a werewolf, or periodic shapeshifting of education. World-enshittification and the solipsistic logic that perpetuates it is a problem of isolation. Thus, love responds to this challenge insofar as it turns one outside oneself. Turning outside oneself and to one's worlds is also a turn to community, for just like the others that are presupposed in the constraints Doctorow offers, so too love presupposes others. It is amongst these others that love may begin to work, but that work is the slow-work of creation, cultivation, and continuation rather than the speedy work of bullets—silver or otherwise.

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