

Chapter 2

Knowledge: Navigating the Visual Ecology—Information Literacy and the ‘Knowledgescape’ in Young Adult Fiction

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2.1 Changing Times: Information Literacy in a Digital Age

The poet John Milton, according to popular belief, might have been the last man to grasp the sum-total of recorded knowledge by reading—around 400 years ago—every book contemporaneously in print (Pepperell 2009, p. 384). Today, a single issue of *The New York Times* contains more information than an average man in the seventeenth century would have had access to in his lifetime (Epstein 2007, p. 20). In this milieu of ever-expanding knowledge—dubbed by many the Information Age—information literacy, or in broad terms, the ability to identify, analyse and use information effectively and responsibly, has been heralded by educators as an essential skill for the modern child as well as the life-long learner. The ‘very broad institutional acceptance’ of information literacy in the United States, as well as its animated discussion in library science journals in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, suggests that information literacy is becoming a valued and recognised element of contemporary learning (Purdue 2003, p. 653). How, then, and to what extent has this overwhelming concern with information literacy made its mark on literature for children and young adults? Using Bertagna’s *Exodus* (2003) and Veronica Roth’s *Divergent* (2011) as case studies, I consider how contemporary fiction is responding to the exponential increase in information that characterises the Information Age. I pay particular attention to instances of media-induced stress, and what has variously been termed ‘information anxiety’ (Wurman 1989) and ‘information trauma’ (Epstein 2007), and suggest that the textual trope of a ‘knowledgescape’—or digital landscape—renders the quest to navigate today’s information-saturated environments a metaphor for becoming information literate.

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Of the several descriptions of information literacy that have been advanced over the past few years, the definition offered by the Final Report of the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, released almost twenty-five years ago by the US Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), is the most-widely cited.¹ The ACRL defines information literacy as ‘the skills to be able to locate, evaluate, and effectively use information for any given need’. ‘Information literacy,’ it argues, ‘is a means of personal empowerment. It allows people to verify or refute expert opinion and to become independent seekers of truth’. ‘Ultimately,’ it concludes, ‘information literate people are those who have learned how to learn’. In the primary, secondary and higher education institution there is continuing debate over the division of roles between classroom, faculty and library staff in the teaching of information literacy (see, for instance, Albitz 2007). Despite the confusion that this relatively recent concept still inspires, information literacy is nevertheless generally considered ‘a unique set of skills and cognitive abilities’ and an increasingly important learning imperative (Scales et al. 2005, p. 235). In 2005, the UNESCO-sponsored ‘Information Literacy Meeting of Experts’ issued ‘The Alexandria Proclamation on Information Literacy and Lifelong Learning’ which stated that information literacy ‘is a basic human right in a digital world’ (Garner 2006, p. 3). By 2009, the concept had generated so much discussion that US President Barack Obama declared October to be ‘National Information Literacy Awareness Month’ (Haras and Brasley 2011).

Considering the levels of acceptance of information literacy in social and educational agendas, it is to be assumed that this concept has had some bearing on contemporary fiction for children and young adults. A quick browse of recently published print titles referencing digital technologies suggests the interpolation of internet-related knowledge practices in contemporary thinking, in matters as diverse as love—*Luv @ First Site (TodaysGirls.com #5)* (Kindig et al. 2004)—adventure—*Digital Disaster (Hyperlinkz #1)* (Elmer 2004)—crime—*Hacker-teen: Volume 1: Internet Blackout* (Marques 2008)—and philosophy—*Young Ethan’s Internet Search (for the Truth)* (Kessler 2004). The fact that these novels are invariably serialized reflects the limitless nature of contemporary media engagement whereby information is quickly consumed and continuously generated, circulated and recreated in endless feedback loops thereby perpetuating rapid information expansion. More nuanced portrayals can be found in futuristic fantasies that grapple with the posthuman condition in worlds in which technological prostheses—including informational systems—have become integrated into the human condition. M.T. Anderson’s *Feed* (2004), as a classic example, imagines a future America in which an internet ‘feed’ implanted in peoples’ brains renders all recorded knowledge already a property of the human brain and forever mediated by consumer advertising; the functioning (post)human in this primarily illiterate society is not one who *knows* more than anyone else but one who is able to access information more efficiently.

Anderson’s *Feed* indicates that contemporary authors are increasingly engaging with the accessibility of knowledge rather than the ontological properties of knowledge itself. Such an epistemological concern reveals a preoccupation with

formalism that Hirsch (1987) has noted more generally in pedagogical practices. Formalism, as defined by Hirsch, is the contention that ‘how-to knowledge, skills that are universally applicable to all circumstances of life, is the important thing to be learned’ (p. 11). Clark has expanded Hirsch’s original thesis to contend that formalism is a ‘focus on skills, not knowledge; on rhetoric or style, not content (be that information or ideas); on process, not substance; on ideology, not truth’ (2009, p. 509). In this aggregated set of dichotomies, knowledge is rendered less important than the stylistic vestments in which it is couched. Such a vision corresponds with Purdue’s definition of information literacy ‘[a]t its worst,’ which he argues ‘is merely a set of skills to enable individuals to ‘manage information’ more efficiently’ (2003, p. 654). In this bleak rendition of educational practice in which content is subsumed to form and substance to process, one encounters an interpretation of the educational establishment as an institution liable to show less concern for ‘knowledge’ than for equipping students with the skills to contend with the increasing pressures of information expansion.

The diverse ways in which knowledge can be generated, structured and disseminated in today’s digital cultures renders information acquisition dependent on a grasp of multimodal knowledge practices. Stephens and Geerts (2013) have noted that contemporary Dutch and English adaptations of traditional tales and story motifs for children display an increasing awareness of such multimodality since today’s readers ‘require texts of a kind which adapt the cultures of the past to engage with the diffuse nature of contemporary textuality and information flows’ including the ‘random swirl of information’ conjured up by an internet search browser. These texts, they suggest, often exhibit a playfully hypertextual ‘mish-mash’ of various source texts and thereby encourage readers to turn to internet search engines or information sites such as Wikipedia to fill in the gaps. Whilst I agree with Stephens and Geerts that this emerging trend can indeed ‘open up other avenues of pleasure’ for the inquisitive child reader, I suggest that this overt awareness of information inundation is also the subject of less playful textual strategies in fiction for older readers.

The sheer volume of information circulating in today’s multimedia environments has given rise to the medical condition Information Fatigue Syndrome (IFS), referring to the anxiety, stress and weariness caused through what is colloquially termed ‘information overload’ (Wilson and Lizabeth 2001, p. 1). An analysis of today’s increasing preoccupation with information ill/literacy and its manifestations in children’s texts must take into account such instances of information-induced stress. ‘Information anxiety,’ Wurman argues ‘is the black hole between data and knowledge. It happens when information doesn’t tell us what we want or need to know’ (1989, p. 34). According to Epstein, this knowledge gap reflects the wider postmodern condition whereby the individual is appreciative of ‘surfaces and signifiers, traces and simulacra, while resisting depths and meanings’; the lack of concentration of the contemporary information user, he notes, can be likened to the ‘symptoms we might expect of one who has undergone an acutely traumatic experience’ (2007, p. 21). Such concepts reveal a general acknowledgement that the limitations of epistemic institutions and the fallible

conditions under which knowledge is produced necessarily hinder our capacity to become information literate. In a context in which ‘drowning in the abundance of information that floods [our] lives’ is considered a possibility, information literacy—as the ACRL notes—is nothing short of a ‘survival skill’.

A growing preoccupation with information anxiety in recent young adult fiction reflects this distinctly (post)modern manifestation of trauma and centres on the key premise that traditional knowledge institutions are struggling to keep up with the demands of a rapidly expanding knowledge economy. I suggest a further tendency in such literature to envisage knowledge-seeking in spatial terms, in correspondence with Marcum’s claim that today’s information-overloaded reality constitutes a ‘visual ecology’ (2002, p. 189). The visual ecology, as defined by Marcum, is a ‘universe of action’ arising through ‘the dynamic, discontinuous, individualized, random access texture of our experience,’ rendering ‘many existing institutions, resources, and cultural mores dysfunctional in various degrees’ (pp. 189, 190). In Bertagna’s and Roth’s novels the visual ecology is communicated via the trope of a digital landscape that is shaped by the knowledge choices of its users. In these novels the classic bildungsroman takes an epistemological turn; knowledge acquisition for the young protagonists inheres in attempts to navigate the spatial parameters of what I hereby dub these digital ‘knowledgescapes’. A geographical rendition of knowledge acquisition corresponds with the concluding statements of the ACRL final report:

To respond effectively to an ever-changing environment, people need more than just a knowledge base, they also need techniques for exploring it, connecting it to other knowledge bases, and making practical use of it. In other words, the landscape upon which we used to stand has been transformed, and we are being forced to establish a new foundation called information literacy.

I turn to these new landscapes—or ‘knowledgescapes’—to consider the impact of information literacy on contemporary young adult fiction.

2.2 Information Anxiety: The ‘Knowledgescape’ as Trope in Contemporary Fiction

In the far-future world of Bertagna’s *Exodus* (2003), in which only isolated islands remain above water after the melting of the polar icecaps, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, Mara, struggles to uncover the history of the world’s drowning by wading through the masses of unfiltered data left behind by defunct global communications systems. Her quest to find a safe home for the flood refugees pits her against two important knowledge institutions—the internet (in its first incarnation as ‘the Weave’ and in its reincarnation as ‘the Noos’) and the library of Glasgow University. These traditional establishments are discursively constructed as spatialities in need of physical navigation by the information user. Mara’s schema for knowledge acquisition is predicated on the need to become information literate: ‘[S]he needs more than shimmering visions. She needs rock-solid evidence; something she can believe in.

Something everyone can believe in' (p. 38). This epistemological progression from raw data to knowledge to understanding—of both a personal and collective nature—defines the parameters within which she can successfully contribute towards the development—and survival—of her community.

The 'cryptic symbols' that allow Mara access to the internet-like Weave immediately render this electronic space accessible only to those with technical ability (p. 26). The '*wide electronic boulevard[s]*,' '*buzzing, sparking towerstacks*' and '*glittering electronic strands*' through which Mara '*zips and zooms*' mark the Weave as a vast urban landscape (pp. 26–27). In this gated community, the droll narratorial admission that Mara 'has picked up cyberwizzdom with the greed and instinct of an animal on the scent of a hunt' renders knowledge acquisition the epistemological equivalent of survival of the fittest (p. 26). In intertextual adherence to the epithet 'all that glitters is not gold,' the knowledge encapsulated by the Weave is found to be inaccessible, unreliable and hostile to the user. Mara's long, empty joyrides through this digital landscape afford her the temporary pleasures of thrill-seeking yet ultimately leave her feeling frustrated and apathetic since 'looking for anything in there is like looking for a needle in a million haystacks' (p. 145). Polluted by a 'great spill of electronic litter,' the Weave is a discursive site of epistemic atrophy: a visual ecology promising 'infinite possibility, an endless unfolding of choices' yet finally offering nothing except a 'venomous froth of data-decay' (pp. 27, 28). This ghostly graveyard of recorded knowledge functions as an illusory palimpsest of human hopes and dreams assembled under the ostensible banner of progress. In this eerie electronic space where 'glittering strands' turn to 'bleak ruins and wasted boulevards' when viewed 'up close,' knowledge has atrophied to such an extent that the Weave has grown 'wild and savage' (pp. 27, 28).

If the University of Glasgow's more ancient knowledge institution, the library, promises a medium less susceptible to epistemic atrophy, knowledge acquisition is nevertheless found to induce similar anxiety. The crumbling ruins of the university library are spatially intimidating; 'towering book stacks,' '[b]ook avalanches' and 'paper mountains' threaten to collapse in telling echo of the 'tumbledown towerstacks,' 'rotting heaps' and 'junk mountain[s]' of the Weave (pp. 152, 27). These vast edifices of knowledge that physically dwarf the information-seeker promise much but deliver little: 'How will she ever find the information she needs in these mountains of books?' Mara sighs as she wanders aimlessly through the library's ruins, contemplating the 'thousand lives' she would need to sift through the available information (p. 153). If the rotting heaps of electronic waste and mutated creatures of cyberspace are a symbol of the failure of global communications systems, the 'feathers and droppings' littering the books of the library are comparably haunting invocations of epistemic decay (p. 153). In the dank and rotten halls of the university library, knowledge is discursively hidden within space and buried under layers of historical process.

Mara's entry into the virtual world of the Noos—the New World's reincarnation of the internet—positions her on the opposite side of the information superhighway, leaving her struggling 'to get to grips with the New World technology' (p. 223). In this new cyberspace, changing technologies have rendered older epistemic systems

obsolete. Mara's instructions to the search engine of the Noos to find her a 'story' are particularly telling:

'I want a story,' she instructs the small glitter-ball of electronic energy that immediately bounces towards her.

The glittering search-ball bounces high into Noospace and explodes in a million fragments – electronic questers – that scatter across the mutating patterns. Moments later, like a reverse explosion, the fragments zoom back into a ball, having searched the Noos to find what Mara wants.

Storey as in floor, level in building? the glitter-ball reports back.

'No, S-T-O-R-Y,' says Mara. 'As in once upon a time.'

Falsehood, lie, it suggests, when it's back in one piece.

Mara sighs. 'No. Try books.'

Boots?

'Books!'

The search-ball scatters yet again and takes a moment longer than usual to gather back the questers. Mara's hopes rise as she watches the glittering fragments gather into a globe.

Defunct word, it claims uselessly. (p. 255)

In eliminating story from the New World hegemony, the sky cities have dismantled the conceptual parameters within which Mara has learnt to assemble knowledge into understanding in her progression towards information literacy. Within this 'living world of info and data,' Mara must 'freefall' until she learns to steer 'to whatever or wherever' she seeks (pp. 239, 238). The Noos has reconstituted the internet as a virtual space of momentary creation and recreation—a visual ecology—in which information literacy is the key to successful social functioning. If Mara is to gain entry to this gated community she must master the technological apparatus through which knowledge is transmitted and spatially navigate the vast terrain that constitutes the expanding knowledgescape.

Roth's *Divergent* portrays a future world with similarly sophisticated technologies capable of constructing digital landscapes from the data stored on centralised computer systems. Tris, the sixteen-year-old protagonist, is forced to traverse a series of these simulated landscapes, dubbed 'fear landscapes,' in order to become a member of the Dauntless faction, one of the five factions—or population groups—which make up the novel's urban setting. These simulated landscapes are designed to test the initiates' capacity for bravery in the face of anxiety and self-doubt; traversal of the fear landscapes is a process of spatial navigation around virtual obstacles drawn from the initiates' 'worst fears' (p. 296). Considered the culmination of the Dauntless initiation following weeks of instruction, preparation, practice and evaluation, these digital landscapes function as knowledgespaces: changing terrains of data designed to test the initiates' intellectual capabilities. Tris' attempts to analyse these digital landscapes, evaluate their reliability and interpret them in light of the initiation requirements outline her progression towards information literacy.

In a 'huge, dank space' in the Dauntless compound, the initiates' fear landscapes are superimposed onto the physical features of the room to create a visual ecology that 'feels real' even though it is electronically simulated (pp. 296, 234). These virtual landscapes require the initiates 'to combine the physical abilities [they] learned in stage one with the emotional mastery [they] learned in stage

two,’ thereby forcing them to analyse their fears and ‘develop strategies to face them’ (pp. 297–298). Shifting according to Tris’ emotional responses, these landscapes take the form of stormy skies, enclosed spaces or raging seas; within these spatial parameters, Tris must undertake a form of intellectual reasoning ‘to figure out what th[e] simulation means’ (p. 384). Whilst Mara in *Exodus* uses knowledge acquisition as a point of entry into the wider world, Tris turns her gaze inwards to navigate her knowledgescape through her increasing understanding of the self:

I am not afraid of drowning. This is not about the water; it is about my inability to escape the tank. It is about weakness. I just have to convince myself that I am strong enough to break the glass. [...] I ball my hands up into fists and pound on the wall. I am stronger than the glass. The glass is as thin as newly frozen ice. My mind will make it so. I close my eyes. The glass is ice. The glass is ice. The glass is—.(pp. 385–386)

Tris’ success in manipulating the simulations at the point at which they become most threatening renders information literacy a tool for developing agency within the constraints of an imposed epistemic framework. By learning to apply both logic and emotion to her interactions with these digital landscapes, Tris successfully challenges the anxiety caused by information inundation and ‘take[s] control of the situation’ (p. 394). As in *Exodus*, information literacy is here a combination of mastering the technical apparatus through which knowledge is communicated and spatially navigating the visual ecology.

2.3 Information Inequality: Topographies of the ‘Knowledgescape’

The trope that I have dubbed the ‘knowledgescape’ is a telling indicator of the significance of information expansion to contemporary young adult fiction and centres on the capacity of the subject to become information literate through successful navigation of the visual ecology. Katz (2001) has developed the concept of ‘doing a topography’ in feminist political geography that gives a useful starting point for an analysis of this trope in contemporary young adult fiction. ‘To do a topography,’ Katz contends, is to analyse the various salient features and spatial coordinates of a landscape in order to ‘excavate the layers of process that produce particular places’ (pp. 1231, 1228). Such analysis helps one consider the various ways in which social practices ‘sedimented into space’ impact upon the physical landscape (p. 1229). ‘Revealing the embeddedness of these practices in place and space,’ she argues, ‘in turn invites the vivid revelation of social and political difference and inequality’ (p. 1228). Topographies, understood in this way, can unearth the social and political determinants of particular landscapes. To do a topography of the knowledgescapes of contemporary fiction is to analyse these textual landscapes as a set of spatial features shaped by the knowledge choices of the societies that construct them. Such an analysis of Bertagna’s and Roth’s novels reveals the social and political ideologies that underpin the knowledge practices of the depicted societies, with a focus on the information inequality that lies at the heart of each society.

To do a topography of the knowledgescapes of *Exodus* is to plot Mara's progression towards information literacy against her increasing understanding of the social inequalities that underpin the New World. Mara's early realisation that she has failed to understand the wider political implications of the Weave reveals that insularity or ignorance can limit the effectiveness of the knowledgescapes as a space for information acquisition:

How could she spend half of her life in the Weave and never see the truth? How did she not see those awful cries for help that lie among the ruins and junk mountains of the Weave? She thought it was an adventure playground, that's all, and she's been so engrossed in her thrills and spills that she hasn't seen what should have stopped her in her tracks long, long ago. (p. 52)

The 'awful cries for help' that discursively narrate the world's drowning lie in forgotten corners of the Weave, embedded in the landscape. Mara's sudden awareness of these SOS messages quite literally changes the epistemic terrain, forcing her to interrogate the social and political ideologies that have led to the collapse of the 'old world'. Mara's journeys through the Weave and later the Noos take on new definition; rather than 'freefalling' through the endless vortexes of data, her searches are targeted towards unearthing information about the social inequalities that allow the New World populations to live in luxury whilst the rest of the world works as indentured slaves or drowns. Navigation of the knowledgescapes now leaves her 'shocked to the core'; 'Before, fear was a game,' she realises, '[n]ow it's far too real' (pp. 47, 182).

Mara's increasingly fraught journeys through the New World's knowledgescapes uncover the segregated knowledge practices that bolster the socially divisive policies of the sky cities. The Weave, the Noos and the University are all implicated in the uneven distribution of wealth and privilege that defines the New World social system. The University library is particularly reviled by the group of flood refugees clinging to life at the foot of one of the towering sky cities; labelled the 'bad place' with its 'poisonous books,' the library is shunned for being the ideological foundation of the new sky city 'that lives only for itself in its own world of dreams and forgets the rest of the world' (pp. 156, 158). Knowledge acquisition is here construed as a tool for elitism rather than social equality or community cohesion; referring to Caledon, the founder of the New World, the flood refugees note that: 'If it wasn't for the ideas that he found in his books there would be no bars between our world and the sky, no wall to trap us inside and the others outside' (p. 194). Learning is perceived to erect physical barriers—bars and walls—between those who benefit from hegemonic knowledge practices and those who fall on the wrong side of the knowledge divide. The gated community of the New World resembles the Weave in its insularity, enclosing its inhabitants within a visual ecology of 'cybervizits and safaris, realsports and feelmovies, blisspools, solhols, zoominlums, colourjetting, sensawave clubbing, fear circuses and a hundred other entertainments' whilst barring entry to the disenfranchised (p. 249). A topography of this artificial landscape reveals the social inequalities embedded in its layout; Mara's progression towards information literacy invests her with the skills not simply to navigate its spatial parameters but also to interrogate its political foundations.

To do a topography of the knowledgescapes of *Divergent* is similarly to map Tris' progression towards information literacy against her growing understanding of her socially and politically divided society. The 'empty room' onto which the initiates' fear landscapes are superimposed acts as a canvas for the initiates' ideological refashioning (p. 297). A textual focus on the emptiness of space—in juxtaposition with a crowded visual ecology—forges a semantic link between the space in which knowledge acquisition is enacted and the 'building skeletons and broken sidewalks... [and] empty subways' of societies' 'factionless' (p. 25). These homeless citizens, disinclined or unable to function within the tightly policed faction parameters, live lives 'divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life: community' (p. 20). Tris' father's injunction early in the novel that '[v]aluing knowledge above all else results in a lust for power, and that leads men into dark and empty places' renders knowledge acquisition similarly conducive to anti-social behaviour (p. 35). That knowledge is associated both with power and with emptiness—holding out the promise of filling a void whilst leading one further into dark and empty places—intimates that learning results not in the social harmony to which Tris' society ostensibly strives but in a stratified society that denies social welfare to those who fail interpellation by the epistemic superstructure.

In a society divided into five factions, each concerned with nurturing its own particular virtue, the allocation of all knowledge to the Erudite faction enforces cultural uniformity via the widespread information *ill*iteracy of the remaining factions. The flawed logic that prompts Jeanine, the Erudite leader, to wage a war for control of the government pivots on a linear understanding of information acquisition: 'She is more machine than maniac. She sees problems and forms solutions based on the data she collects [...] [T]o her it is just crossing off an item from a list of tasks, the only logical progression of the particular path that she is on' (pp. 431–432, 435). Whilst Tris learns to apply both logic and emotion to navigate her simulated landscapes, Jeanine lacks the emotional comprehension to deal responsibly with the 'data she collects'. The Erudite headquarters—like the gleaming New World sky cities in *Exodus*—are a telling representation of the academic ivory tower with its floors of 'white tile,' walls that 'glow' and mirror-like doors that make Tris squint (p. 355). To do a topography of the empty spaces of *Divergent*'s knowledgescapes is thus to analyse the knowledge divide that flourishes under Jeanine's leadership as a strategy for producing and policing difference. Within such a context of information inequality, Tris' 'divergent' personality—rendering her capable of independent thought—is the key to her counterhegemonic progression towards information literacy.

2.4 Conclusion: Information Literacy and the Visual Ecology

Both *Exodus* and *Divergent* use the immediacy of the present tense to convey the vividness, saturation and moment-to-moment nature of the visual ecology. Information overload threatens to mire the protagonists in chains of empty signifiers

at the behest of crumbling knowledge institutions where information disassembles into data rather than assembling into understanding. In accordance with Hirsch's definition of formalism, these novels exhibit tension that the 'how-to' of knowledge practices—how to *access* it, how to *use* it, how to *consume* it, and in this case how to *traverse* it—may be more important to a young adult's successful social functioning than the actual *knowing* of knowledge itself. So how does the 'knowledgescape' inform an understanding of the impact of information literacy on contemporary fiction for children and young adults? The knowledgescape, as I have defined it, is a trope that represents the modern visual ecology as a digital landscape that must be navigated by the novels' information-seekers. Traversal of this landscape is predicated on gaining the skills both to master the technological apparatus by which knowledge is communicated and to understand the social and political underpinnings of institutionalised knowledge practices. As such, it is metonymic of a young person's progression towards information literacy.

The challenge facing educational establishments going forwards is to ensure that information literacy functions 'at its best' to facilitate the active citizenship that the ACRL proclaims should result from a critical engagement with knowledge (Purdue 2003, p. 654). Shapiro and Hughes argue that it should therefore 'be something broader' than the basic knowledge management skills that allow an individual to consume information more efficiently (1996, p. 35). Instead, information literacy should be something that allows individuals 'to think critically about the entire information enterprise and information society': something 'more akin to a 'liberal art'—knowledge that is part of what it means to be a free person in the present historical context of the dawn of the information age' (p. 35). This rather grand prognostication nevertheless gets to the heart of the epistemic reconceptualisation offered by these novels. Information literacy in this instance takes on an ethical dimension and corresponds with the ACRL's definition of citizenship as a state of affiliation that 'in a modern democracy involves more than knowledge of how to access vital information. It also involves a capacity to recognize propaganda, distortion, and other misuses and abuses of information'. Tris' counterhegemonic acts as she strives to 'acquir[e] the skills to force the bad out of our world so that the good can prosper and thrive,' and Mara's pledge to keep 'furiously turning ideas over in her head' until she finds a way to expose the New World's social injustices inspire hope in the altruistic ways in which knowledge practices can be locally applied to better serve human community (Roth 2011, p. 412; Bertagna 2003, p. 144).

'Because we have been hit by a tidal wave of information,' contends the ACRL, 'what used to suffice as literacy no longer suffices; what used to count as effective knowledge no longer meets our needs; what used to pass as a good education no longer is adequate'. Contemporary young adult fiction is responding to this broader recognition that traditional epistemic practices—from literacy, to knowledge acquisition, to education—no longer suffice. A change can be recognised in the ways in which young adult novels are handling epistemological processes as well as the attention given to the potential dangers and frustrations of contemporary knowledge acquisition. Common concerns centre on information inequality between groups with differing levels of access to the technologies and resources

that characterise today's visual ecology. Such concerns are telling precursors of the psychological anxiety warned of by Wurman and Epstein that centres on the gap between what we know and what we *think* we should know in our information-saturated societies. Whilst two novels do not make a trend, such a narrative motif is an arguable indication of young peoples' wider concerns over information literacy in the digital age. Only the information literate individual, these novels suggest, will be able to participate fully in, and contribute responsibly towards, today's ever-expanding knowledge economy.

Note

1. Quotations from the ACRL (here and in the remainder of the chapter) are taken from the Final Report (1989) of the Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, published by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL): <http://www.ala.org/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential/>. Accessed 15 September 2012.

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(Re)imagining the World

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