

University of Western Sydney

Sabrina Achilles

Performative Pedagogy and Hypertext

Introduction

Gunther Kress, in his article, 'Visual and Verbal Modes of Representation in Electronically Mediated Communication' (Kress 1998), puts forward the notion that what is needed is a new pedagogical approach to replace that of critique, which for Kress should be seen as belonging to 'a particular period, ...an historical phenomenon' (77), and that period is not the present one. Kress describes the present period as one of 'intense social change' (77), which he attributes to the "'Electronic Age'" and its revolutionary effects (75). For Kress, critique is suited to 'periods of relative social stability' (77), it 'looks at the present through the means of past production' (77) and functions to introduce a 'dynamic into the system' (77). But in our Electronic Age there is little or no textual stability and due to this we need to adopt the textual principles of Design. Writes Kress, where 'critique looks at the present through the means of past production, design shapes the future through deliberate deployment of representational resources in the designer's interest' (77). For Kress, in our 'present technological context of electronic, multimodal, multimedia textual production' (77), individuals ought to be 'the remakers, transformers, of sets of representational resources - rather than users of stable systems, in a situation where multiple representational modes are brought into textual compositions' (77).

Kress' declaration is in some ways perhaps surprising in light of the approaches to text, in the curriculum and pedagogy, in most Communications and the New Humanities courses. For some time students have been taught the 'representational resources' of texts in the form of narrative, image, genre, discourse, rhetoric and language, in part for the purpose of critique but also for the purpose of creating texts. Such approaches have serviced courses in both writing and image production. In such courses critique is indeed only a small part of the approach to text. However, Kress' remarks probe further and need further thought. For Kress, 'dominant theories of semiosis - in linguistics by and large - are *theories of use* that regard language as a stable (and largely autonomous) system of elements, categories, and rules of combination' (74). While Kress' discussion is in the context of an 'exponential expansion' (54) of 'visual' technologies, Kress' call is to all users of text since the expansion of 'electronic technologies will entrench visual modes of communication as a rival to language in many domains of public life' (55). It seems that for Kress we need to take an approach to text which is a 'visual' or a Design approach, since this approach is used in 'shaping texts for future use'.

Storyspace

Storyspace is a hypertext writing program, created by Eastgate Systems. It has several possible applications but it is widely employed for writing fiction. The hypertext program changes the way in which texts, including fiction, may be written and read. In some respects it bears some of the 'textual principles' of Design. For Kress the textual principles of design involve visual literacy. For Kress, design is visually literate since designers must be familiar with the technology and resources involved with the visual medium, including 'understanding the semiotic potentials of each mode - sound, visual, speech' (56). Writes Kress, 'beyond that it requires the orchestration and remaking of these resources in the service of frameworks and models that express the maker's intentions in shaping the social and cultural environment' (77). Hypertext programs, such as *Storyspace*, also involve multimedia technology, but in particular hypertext involves 'the orchestration and remaking of...resources'. In hypertext there remains no stable text belonging to past production, the reason for which I will come to.

However, hypertext also differs from Design's textual principles. As mentioned, design embarks on the remaking of resources 'in the service of *frameworks* and *models* that express the maker's intentions in shaping the social and cultural environment' (my italics, Kress 77). Hypertext, on the other hand is a fluid environment, it is 'theoretically infinite, open-ended, variable and disorderly', as Mireille Rosello writes (Rosello 1994: 147), and so no frameworks and models can be achieved. As Rosello says, for certain specialists, hypertexts would not be seen as 'inherently liberatory' because of their open-endedness. The question remains, then, can hypertext be used for 'shaping the social and cultural environment'? Can it rival, for instance, Design's textual principles and become a significant pedagogical tool in approaching texts productively rather than critically?

But of interest to this paper also is the way in which *Storyspace* may be used to think about literary discourse and how this may inform a pedagogy that does not begin from the premise of a 'stable...system of elements, categories and rules of combination', but which, nonetheless, differs from the textual practices of Design. I will first discuss the nature of hypertext in brief.

Storyspace is a hypertext program involving electronically-linked text. It consists of writing spaces which may hold other writing spaces and inside the writing spaces are text spaces. Links may be made between all writing spaces and between any area of text within a text space to either another area of text or another writing space. Connected spaces become vectors. Hypertext, then, is a link-rich writing environment where the reader may choose among many links and create their own text following the available links, rather than following a linear path set by the writer. Thus, the reader becomes a writer too, of a kind.

In hypertext, then, both the writer and reader use the linking system to 'remake' and 'transform' given 'elements, categories and rules of combination'. Due to the linking system, writer and reader do not carry out an activity upon a stable text and therefore past production. Another way to say this is to say that due to the linking system, hypertext presents a topology which is without 'a stable system of elements'. Both the writer and reader, rather than working on a past (stable) production, then, *perform* a text.

The performative nature of hypertexts, such as *Storyspace*, are easily likened to Barthes' notion of text as 'a methodological field' (Barthes 1984: 157). Barthes compares the text to the work which he describes as a 'fragment of substance' (156), something which is displayed - while the text is demonstrated. For this comparison he evokes 'Lacan's distinction between "reality" and "the real", the

one is displayed, the other demonstrated' (157). I will be returning to this performative, demonstrative nature of hypertext, later on.

In her article, 'The Screener's Maps', Rosello also compares the (printed) book to (hyper)text. Rosello, like Heim, Ong, Bolter and others, looks to hypertext technology to offer a new textual theory, which not so coincidentally reflects the concerns expressed by Kress. Like Kress, the above players see the need for a new pedagogy and curriculum to accompany hypertext writing technology and other electronic means of communication. It seems that what is at stake is no less than the 'design' for future human dispositions. For Ong and Heim, the "entire human personality is configured anew with every shift in the dominant medium for preserving thought" (quoted by Gaggi 1998: 113). Rosello argues that while we still apply the rhetorical principles of print to hypertext, we will not fully develop the different subjectivity belonging to postmodern hyperspace. For Kress, the question is also one of human disposition, he writes: 'the contents and processes put forward in curriculum and in its associated pedagogy are the design for future human dispositions' (1998: 78).

For Rosello, Bolter, Heim and others print technology has functioned to stabilise thought. The resultant culture is one in which the book is taken seriously - critique being the pedagogical result - and the subject disposition is also one of apparent consistency. Print or literary culture produces a stable disposition because it is characterised by a 'complex, sequential, and hierarchical style of thought' (Gaggi 1998: 113). Complex syntactical and organisational arrangements in turn develop complex arguments, whose 'serious' quality is compounded when it is repeated across perfect volumes of printed texts. For Heim:

"...the stability of the book encourages a view of ideas as fixed and permanent, and this Platonic sense of the permanence of ideas is reflected in the mind itself, whose flux is stabilized and focused as a result... Finally, the book fosters a sense of mental privacy, in which the individual mind is felt to be a locus where ideas originate. Thus, the book encourages a disciplined and orderly mental attitude that valorises personal, individual contemplation as a means of gaining access to ideas that are regarded as transcendental truths". (quoted by Gaggi 1998: 113)

For Rosello, our printed texts create a 'separate identity' analogous to Heim's 'individual mind' when they follow hierarchical modes of organisation. She notes that our printed texts are saturated with hierarchies; the quotation in a printed text creates a 'main' text and a minority or subsidiary discourse. To quote Rosello in full:

When linearity is dominant, quotations - like footnotes, or indexes, or tables of contents, or even illustrations and intertextual references - tend to be considered as appendixes, whose supplementary function points both to the incompleteness of the main text and to its will for absolute power, separate identity, immediate presence. (Rosello 1994: 140)

One thing that emerges from Rosello, Heim, Moulthrop and others' discussion of writing technologies is that the subject is affected by the *space* of writing, and that writing is spatial. Writes Bolter: 'Writing is always spatial, and each technology in the history of writing...has presented writers and readers with a different space to exploit' (Bolter 1991: 105). In order to approach questions of pedagogy and curriculum it is necessary to consider the space of writing. The subject of linearity occupies a fixed world/space - the world is infinitely complex, but ultimately, knowable and thereby fixed. For Rosello, the space of linearity mirrors the travel

map; it comprises fixed and immobile roads/texts. A body circulates among these fixed roads (Rosello 1994: 130), or between one fixed point and another. (Print texts are fixed due to their hierarchical and linear structure.) Within the map metaphor space is an empty vessel. That which carries on in the roads is not recorded, is not deemed important to the map. Another way to say this is to say that the hierarchical and linear structure of print culture ensures closure and the result is there is no erring off given pathways.

Rosello finds the map metaphor unfitting for hypertext. For Rosello, what travels in hypertext space is 'weightless information' (130), by which she means the texts in hypertext have the same weight because there is no central, hierarchising, organising principle, where one text is the main one and others peripheral to that text. With the texts all weighted the same, zero space results, or motionless travel; it is not a matter of getting 'from one point of departure to a point of arrival'. For Rosello we need to re-imagine the relationship, then, between body and space/text.

Rosello, draws upon the figure of the *flâneur* to describe the subject/traveller of hypertext. The '*flâneur's* body...does not follow a route or invent new paths toward an old destination' (134). 'They err - they subvert the idea of destination. Their wanderings are not trips, and we may feel that there is no meaning to their aimlessness' (134). However, writes Rosello, 'this meaninglessness ceases as soon as the observer wants to make sense of the trajectory. Whoever observes the *flâneur* has to rethink the relationship between the traveller's body and the map' (134). Rosello draws upon de Certeau here, who notes that the use of streets by people means that there is no neutral map (de Certeau 1988). For de Certeau, the map the wanderer makes is in 'a different, more local sense' (Rosello 1994: 137). In other words, the *flâneur*, like the reader/writer of hypertext, which Rosello calls the screener, writes their own text/space. This is a departure from the old paradigm of writer (of the map) and reader (user of the map), and of primary (map) and secondary texts. The *local* aspect of the screener's map makes it a political map/text. It, then, serves the screener's interests, just as the designer's remaking is dictated to by his interests.

For Rosello, then, the *flâneur*, née screener, 'subverts the vision of space as an empty vessel, a neutral receptacle of the network' (243). Space as 'a neutral receptacle of the network' can be compared to de Certeau's notion of a strategic use of space. To quote de Certeau, 'I call a "strategy" the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment' (de Certeau 1988: :xix). The strategic, for de Certeau, functions as *proper*. It becomes the official space and functions to affect 'an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clientèles," "targets," or "objects" of research)' (xix). De Certeau's oppositional term, 'tactic', can, on the other hand, be used to conceptualise hyperspace and the screener's activity. The tactic is a calculus which insinuates itself into the place of the proper but only 'fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety... It has at its disposal no *base* where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances' (my italics, xix). Writes de Certeau:

The "proper" is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time - it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized "on the wing". Whatever it wins, it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities". (de Certeau 1988: xix)

So, another way to express hyperspace is as a tactical use of space, an unofficial use of space.

As a performative pedagogy, then, hypertext differs from the textual principles of design. Like de Certeau's tactic, it is 'a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality' (de Certeau 1988: xix). In other words, it does not 'shape the future' but returns official space/form/maps to the 'environment'. This form of reading/writing (screening) may be understood in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialised language, which in turn opens the theorisation of hyperspace to literary discourse. In *Dialogues* (Deleuze and Parnet 1987) Deleuze and Parnet refer to deterritorialised language as expressed in style. The examples Deleuze and Guattari give of style are mostly literary examples: Beckett, Kafka, Godard and Luca, to name a few. Style, for Deleuze and Guattari, is capable of producing a 'line of flight', by which they mean an escape from a major language - a major language is like the official space of the strategic, it is the 'languages of masters' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 26). Deterritorialised language is performed language, in the way tactical space is performed and the space of the *flâneur* is performed. It is not language which produces a *base* or a *place*. Writes Deleuze, with deterritorialised language it is not a matter of interpreting, '(t)here's nothing to understand, nothing to interpret' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 4). You treat the written text like you would treat 'a record you listen to, a film or a TV programme you watch' (4). Says Deleuze, 'In style it is not the words which count, nor the sentences, nor the rhythms and figures...there are no literal words, neither are there metaphors... There are only inexact words to designate something exactly' (3). Hypertext must also be understood in terms of this inexact, performed textuality - which designate something exactly, locally. Writes Deleuze, style

is not a signifying structure, nor a reflective organization, nor a spontaneous inspiration, nor an orchestration, nor a little piece of music. It is an assemblage, an assemblage of enunciation. A style is managing to stammer in one's own language. It is difficult, because there has to be a great need for such stammering... Being like a foreigner in one's own language. (Deleuze and Parnet 1987: 4)

These deterritorialisations, then, are not the *forms* of the future, nothing so canonical, rather, they are performative texts, they belong to enunciation, the event and the environment.

References

- Barthes, R. (1984) *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana Paper Backs. [Return to article](#)
- Bolter, J. D. (1991) 'Topographic Writing: Hypertext and the Electronic Writing Space'. In P. Delany and G. Landow (eds). *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Pp. 105-118. [Return to article](#)
- de Certeau, Michel (1988) *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Tr. S. Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press. [Return to article](#)
- Deleuze, G. and Parnet, C. (1987) *Dialogues*. Tr. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam. New York: Columbia University Press. [Return to article](#)
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1986) *Kafka, Towards a Minor Literature*. Tr. D. Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. [Return to article](#)

Gaggi, S. (1998) 'Hyperrealities and Hypertexts', *From Text to Hypertext: Decentering the Subject in Fiction, Film, the Visual Arts, and Electronic Media*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp. 98-122. Return to article

Kress, G. (1998) 'Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: the potentials of new forms of text'. In I. Snyder (ed). *Page to Screen, Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era*. London: Routledge. Pp. 53-79. Return to article

Rosello, M. (1994) 'The Screener's maps: Michel de Certeau's "Wandermanner" and Paul Auster's Hypertextual Detective'. In G. Landow ed. *Hyper/Text/Theory*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. Pp. 121-157. Return to article

Sabrina Achilles teaches writing and textual theory at the University of Western Sydney. Her novel Waste was published by Local Consumption Press, Sydney, in 1996. She has recently completed a Doctoral thesis theorising the literary aesthetic function in relation to an ethics for a concern for the self.

TEXT

Vol 7 No 2 October 2003

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/>

Editors: Nigel Krauth & Tess Brady

Text@griffith.edu.au