MULTIMODAL, CYBER AND HYPERTEXTS

Multimodality

Multimodal texts are texts which integrate multiple semiotic modes in their communication of meaning. Advertisements are a simple example of such texts, in their common employment of image, colour, layout, text, and typography for attention-grabbing and persuasive effects. Printed multimodal literary fictions tend to employ a similar range of codes, being limited to the printed novel form, but as part of communication of a narrative. Such literary works might arrange the text in non-linear ways around and across the printed pages, offering multipath options, some of which may be contradictory, and the act of choosing between which will shape the reader’s interpretation. The text may interact with images, symbols, shapes and colours, may be printed in a range of fonts, or may disturb the integrity of the page or book itself. In fact, all texts are inherently multimodal, in that, for example, a conventional published poem will consist of text, typography, graphological layout, all of which construct literary prose likewise. Texts categorised as multimodal, though, tend to be recognised as such for the *foregrounding and thus implied interpretative significance of interaction between multiple modes. The postmodern employment and exploitation of semiotic modes is often meta-semiotic in its confrontation of the functioning of signs, symbols and icons, in its exploration of material constraints, in its interrogation of *logocentrism and in its engagement with simulacra. Multimodal theorists within the fields of social semiotics, COGNITIVE POETICS, and STYLISTICS are continuously endeavouring to create a grammar of semiotic modes from which they can more systematically explore interactions between them.

Digital literature

Digital literature utilises new computing devices (being more portable, easier to position, with anti-glare screens, etc.), new computer operating systems, and particularly new graphical user interfaces (methods of manipulation of on-screen objects, such as through the keyboard, mouse, game handset, and more recently through voice activation and motion sensors) to create interactive texts in which the reader (or player, or user) takes a more consciously active role in the construction of the literary experience, by engaging with the program’s designated system of visual-spatial tropes, paths, rules of interaction, and choices in such a way as to create their own path through the various scenes, screens, or, more properly, ‘lexia’ of the text. The act of reading necessarily entails a performative contribution through active use of onscreen icons, scroll bars, menus and so on. Such texts are more overtly free of the constraints of linearity than printed texts (though the freedom to navigate a printed text as one chooses should not be ignored). Digital texts blend narrative, performance and game
play, and often side-step literary conventions requiring narrative arcs, consistency and some form of closure.

*Hypertexts* are texts which are constructed through a series of linked textual units which subvert linear reading conventions. Digital hyperfictions integrate digitized sound, graphics, and text in lexia navigable through hyperlinks and the like.

*Cybertexts* are texts which thematise or in some way explicitly explore the nature and social impact of information technology. Digital mediums have become the obvious choice for such texts.

**Activities**

a) Explore the various semiotic modes at work in a printed advertisement, and consider how they are working together.

b) Read one of the digital texts referenced below *(Link 7, Fast City, and 10:01).* How do you feel about your reading experience? What choices were you offered? How usable or interfering was the graphical user interface? What semiotics modes did the text employ, and how did they work together?

**Discussion**

(i) *all* texts are multimodal

Nina Nørgaard, Beatrix Busse and Rocío Montoro (2010: 119)

Also see: POSTSTRUCTURALISM AND POSTMODERNISM; LINGUISTICS, STYLISTICS AND COGNITIVE POETICS; representation; image... imagination,

READING: *Introductory:* Ensslin 2007*; Nørgaard, Busse and Montoro 2010: 30-34; *Advanced:* Aarseth 1997*; Baldry and Thibault 2006*; Gibbons 2011*; McGann 2001*  (*Bibliographic references further to those in the book*


**The cybertexts referred to above, along with other relevant sites, can be found at:**


Lamb, Malcolm *et al.*, *Link 7* (n.d.)

Guthrie, Tim and Olsen, Lance (2005) *10:01*
http://collection.eliterature.org/1/works/olsen_guthrie_10_01/1001.html

‘Hypertext: Gender Matters’ (n.d.)
http://www.cyberartsweb.org/cpace/cpace/ht/genderov.html

‘The aesthetics of materiality in electronic literature’, by Serge Bouchardon