



The Mobius Band Meets The Lucas Sequence: Intertextuality In "Joker Runs Wild" and "cosine"

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Introduction

Individual creativity is profoundly rhetorical, for it is the subtle interplay between teller and audience that shapes the tales to match the values of that audience (Lakoff, 1982; Ong, 1982). Commenting on the multiple reading paths possible in a hypertext environment, Landow (1994) noted that hypertextual format exposes the dependence of the main text on other texts, thereby reconfiguring the text, the reader, and the author. The decentering of the text dissipates textual as well as authorial uniqueness. Greater autonomy for the reader brings with it the task of creating a coherent narrative or making meaning out of the dispersed and decentered text. The reader can forge a conduit from one interlinked text to the next in a way that constitutes a type of inscription. The actualization of hypertextual space, which is situated in the present act and altered by successive transformations in context, has led theorists to see similarities in the narrative qualities of hypertext and those of oral literature.

The empowerment experienced by both reader and writer results from engagement with the electronic environment, and integration of multiple content through the technology of hypertextual writing. In a handwritten or printed text, the relationship between what is authored and what appears on the writing surface

represents a one-to-one affiliation between the writer and the technology of writing. In an electronic text, this relationship becomes diffused among dyadic affiliations between the writer, the technology, and the text. The writer can work at many levels of meaning and employ diverse strategies within the text, but is nonetheless dependent upon the technology to engage the navigational writing practices of the reader.

The result is a practice of intertextuality that calls into question the performative aspects of authorship. Schutzman's "Joker Runs Wild," designed by Brown, adopts a de-centered text that is a form of inscribed storytelling, while Raikes' "cosine" is performative by virtue of its rhetorical structure. Borrowing on Ong's notions of secondary orality, the multidimensional strategies of storytelling traditions can be mapped onto the "Joker's" image-based text. The rhetorical structures that situate "cosine" within a dialectical tension between prosthesis and performative intertextuality can also be identified and elucidated.

Storytelling Traditions and "Joker Runs Wild"

Ong (1982) argued that electronic technology has introduced the age of secondary orality, which is similar to preliterate oral cultures in "its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even of its use of formulas" (p. 136). Since both reading and writing in the hypertextual environment involve active encounter and traversal, the reader becomes an integral part of the topological space created by interaction with multiple texts.

As Kleine (1992) put it, Ong's central thesis is both simple and powerful: literacy is a technology. The ability to relate the presence of a picture or icon with a function is the first level of postmodern literacy (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978). In such a proscription, the concept of literate authors reaching fictive readers is made problematic because individual practice precludes the simultaneous embrace of a vast audience. There is a dimensional shift performed by the reader whose Web page hyperlinks are not documented as a narrative experience. It is a one-to-many experience of communication for the author, but is received at many points in time by an audience of one. The role of the intertextual author is not always that of the storyteller. Foregoing "the ideal of the book" (Bolter, 1991, p. 2), there is performativity in hypertextual strategies more aligned with Ong's intimations of the bard than those of the modernist author.

"Changing the relationship between language and figurative representation" (Landow, 1994, p. 96) changes the experience of meaning. As Wilden (1987) noted, the digital precision and low diversity of language is different from the

iconic ambiguity and high diversity of visual communication, and in oral modes of expression, all of these characteristics are related by user practice (Ong, 1977). To borrow Burke's phrase (1945, p. xix), "orality narrates the temporal essence from which logical formulations emerge."

Burke's discussion of transformation analyzes how habits associated with print, like linear construction and sequentiality, have become entrenched in our unconscious awareness; narrative does not grow from print. When Raikes states "cosine explores an accumulation of sensory information leading to an experience of simultaneity," she materializes Burke's notion of entrenchment by textually anticipating the trajectory of viewer experience. In hypermedia, the narrative structure cannot contain catharsis because of nonlinearity; therefore, even the best-constructed rhetorical ambitions of the artist are often subverted. Knowledge is not realized through formative dictates, but rather through meaning made at entry and exit points chosen by the reader.

"Joker" makes use of interactivity to communicate Schutzman's phenomenological experience, which allows her to assume a posture characteristic of the storyteller. Orderly types of relationships among the parts of the narrative are abandoned, and as oral storyteller she is deeply embedded in a rhetorical and cultural context. The stories are assembled in close engagement with both the audience and the tribal ground out of which Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) arise. Authorial voice, if you will have it, "...is not expressed as simply individual or 'subjective' but rather as encased in the communal reaction, the communal 'soul'" (Ong, 1982, p. 46).

The storytelling tradition reflected in "Joker" is expressed through the multidimensionality of its hypertextual subjectivity. The materiality of bodies and the object world are transformed by hypertextual cultural production into an aesthetic act where the text and the reader occupy the in-between space of interaction. The unitary subject of the modernist era is thus transformed into the nomadic subject contemplating the bard's experience of social action. "Joker's" intertextual narrative resists the fixed unilinear status of the written word and embraces the open multivalent, ambiguous nature of the spoken word.

Oral storytelling operates at two levels: one is the representation of an incident that happened a long time ago and the other is the enactment of the incident itself. Due to its improvisational character, the interacting whole does not aim to describe some final state to be reached but the storytelling process itself alludes to fluid boundaries in an essentially open structure. Each story is a part of other stories and reflects other stories, even as it simultaneously reflects the landscape.

Schutzman's intersubjectivity frames the context. Her participation/interpretation in and of the workshop constitutes an important element in the narrative. The reader is positioned to investigate the trajectory where the past (Boal's work) and the present (the workshop experience) come together. The telling and retelling of tales, interspersed with personal anecdotes, unfold interrelationships where the past and present come together in the form of stories. The narrative, though auto-phenomenological, is not chronologically arranged; rather, it evokes the world through tales that provide the nurturing ground for the storyteller, as when Schutzman asks: "Being approximate conjures a kind of ambulant approach to knowledge and fact, putting the very notions of precision and accuracy, correctness and literalness into doubt. What do we compromise in our obsession with correctness?"

Such narratives focus on remembering, not in the form of performance but in terms of enactment, which involves a reconfiguring of the past that interrupts and suspends faith in the present. In the contemporaneity of the present moment, the TO tradition that informs the text encodes the cultural experience of the people who invented it, and the retelling of these stories grounds them in the day-to-day narrative of the people who re-enact them.

Prosthesis and "cosine"

Lyotard's (1979) discussion of transformation suggests that technology reduces to performativity. Because the system itself is predicated upon the instrumental rules of scientific discourse, it privileges efficiency. Through the evolution of mechanical (and later electronic) means of enhancing performativity, a closed, self-supported system of determined logic empowers those who generate knowledge.

Lyotard's analysis stresses the importance of evaluating the rules governing the language games built into systems, and Raikes' emphasis on the importance of performativity is reflected in her use of the rheomode, "...an experiment in language in which representation is defined in relation to plurality rather than singularity, movement rather than stasis, energy rather than matter, the wave rather than the particle."

"cosine's" Raikes does not perform as storyteller, but rather assumes the rhetorical position of author, using the fixity of print to destabilize the use of imagery. The visual integration of print text takes precedence in the visceral experience of the reader, rendering the theoretical underpinnings of the presentation transparent. When Raikes asserts textually: "Nothing can be effectively fixed or isolated from anything else. Shift from singular to plural voice of authorship raises new questions about appropriate forms for documentation. The written word is linear,

consecutive, hierarchical..." she is establishing an ontology, not attempting a break with episteme.

According to Ong (1982), writing becomes interiorized; that is why writing is frequently not regarded as a technology. He, along with McLuhan (1964), viewed writing as prosthesis. The prosthesis can assist creativity and provide insight, or generate restrictions and limit vision. The prosthesis is given consideration because it heralds the possibility of identity development and knowledge formation. At the same time that the prosthesis can enable and/or hinder human action it can have an existence of its own. The prosthesis metaphor serves an examination of the nature-culture-technology contradiction.

Virilio's (1995) perception of the history of technology considers how the perception of prostheses encompasses time and space. He argued that the original interface between the human and the world is replaced by a prosthetic boundary where both have the character of machines; thus, perception is automated. The basic distinction between what is human and what is machine is immaterial.

The perpetual negotiation of this boundary engages the human subject in a particular aesthetic, an aesthetic representing the desire to switch from the linear, univocal, closed, authoritative aesthetic involved in passive mechanization (characterized by the performance of the same without difference) to a nonlinear, multi-vocal, open, non-hierarchical aesthetic involving active encounters (marked by repetition of the same with and in difference). Artists using both print and electronic media use strategies of disruption and discontinuity to create visual and textual narratives that are multi-linear, where meaning does not lie in the tracing of one narrative trajectory, but rather in the relationship that various tracings forge with one other.

This knowledge is a pre-existing network, interconnected in extraordinarily complex and non-linear ways and known to the storyteller's audience before the story is begun (Bolter, 1991). "cosine," with its allure to the primal senses, appeals to this pre-existing knowledge. However, the re-creation of the gallery experience on a flat panel invents an ongoing project of metaphoric reverse engineering transacted under the assumption that architectures such as the Internet encourage a reversal of one-way transparency, a sort of reverse panopticon. The panoptic discloses an interesting dynamic, presented through a comparison of "Joker's" metaphoric reference to the Mobius Band (a twisted strip that merges reverse sides of the same image) and "cosine's" adoption of the Lucas Sequence (a series of numbers that mathematically explain a spiral) as the underlying scaffolding of the installation.

Schutzman states: "I became fascinated with a vantage point that could be aligned with that marvelous round of the Mobius strip where inside and outside merge. Where all the lies, the suppositions, the finite drivel of conventions, would reveal from out of their own flesh the infinite other stuff to which they were bound." In Baudrillard's (1994) view, the twisted Mobius strip is an exemplar for the distortion of meaning caused by excess information and by the blurring of the distinction between reality and simulation. According to Gane's (1991) interpretation, the Mobius band is "a spiral of the reversibility of all signs in the shadow of seduction and death" (p. 193). Baudrillard found the Mobius strip idea compatible with his forecast for postmodern society. In the Mobius strip, as in the simulated social order, all dichotomies disappear, and oppositions merge through silent implosion.

For Baudrillard, there is "always a question of proving the real through the imaginary..." (p. 19). His is a philosophy that would appear compatible with the execution of "cosine's" project in which the design of the Lucas Sequence invokes the spiral, but not the dichotomy. The spiral here is made self-consciously mechanical by authorial intent. By "poetically integrating history and progress, [so that] each new number in the series is generated by the sum of the two numbers that precede it," physical law is foregrounded, and the construction of the installation is made visible.

The prosthetic boundary is identified by textual comparisons with the fiction of the live installation. Because of the print narrative, and its explanation of the theoretical framework that inspired the visual concept, regardless of the magnificence of the pictorial representations, despite any virtual navigation of the artifacts, the flat image is subjected to the latent intertextuality of print, and originality lies not so much in the individual creation of elements as in the rhetorical performance of the whole composition.

By borrowing on established physics to construct her space, Raikes induces the boundaries of virtual architecture. Virtual architecture can be differentiated from relational architecture in that the former is based on simulation while the latter is based on dissimulation (Lozano-Hemmer, 2002). Virtual buildings are data constructs that strive for realism, asking the participant to "suspend disbelief" and "play along" with the environment. Relational buildings, on the other hand, are real buildings pretending to be something other than what they are, masquerading as that which they might become, asking participants to "suspend faith" and "probe," to interact and experiment with the false construct. Within "cosine's" virtual building, the construct of "the language of modern physics" (the rheomode) encourages online participants to suspend disbelief, as the performer would have it, rather than suspend faith, as the storyteller would have it.

Conclusion

McLuhan's belief that all technologies create new human environments is informative to any discussion of how the human body is incorporated into the electronic spaces of interactive performance. McLuhan described this process as the externalization of the senses through technological prosthetics. Such "artificial sense organs" can traverse the reverse panoptic of "cosine." The mediation of experience through these extensions reconfigures the senses and leads to a transformation of consciousness. Mediation takes place in response not only to machine technology, but also within social structures, as the phenomenological journey of "Joker Runs Wild" illustrates.

Guattari (1995) focused on the issue of subjectivity in response to humanity's growing dependence on mechanized systems. In response to negative attitudes concerning technology, he questioned whether there is anything new about "subjectivity's entry into the machine...weren't pre-capitalistic or archaic subjectivities already engendered by a variety of initiatory, social and rhetorical machines embedded in clan, religious, military and feudal institutions, among others" (p. 18)? Following the model of subjectivity being constituted through discursive acts, Guattari asserted "today's information and communication machines do not merely convey representational contents, but also contribute to the fabrication of new assemblages of enunciation, individual and collective" (p. 18). The environments of both "Joker Runs Wild" and "cosine" certainly reconfigure consciousness, and fabricate new assemblages of subjectivity, each in distinctly different ways.

Author Note

RuAnn Keith has been a media activist since 1977 when she joined the Bay Area Video Coalition in San Francisco. She worked as a writer and production assistant for several film companies in Los Angeles, and owned a video production business in Denver for 12 years. She is a graduate of Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, received her M.A. from the University of New Mexico, and is currently completing her Ph. D. in Communication at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

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