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Teaching and Learning about Writing in the Digital Media Culture: A Subjective Academic Narrative

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Abstract

What might we teach about/as writing in the digital media culture? In this paper, I survey some ideas of teaching and learning writing in the contemporary digital media culture. I look at how the creative possibilities presented by electronic deliveries are evident to students in their everyday lives, but have yet to be fully utilised in teaching and learning about writing. In utilising a conceptual framework following Gregory Ulmer's 'mystory' (a scholarly story involving the personal, the socially learnt and the applied intellectual that is a combination of 'my story' and 'mystery') I put forward insights developed as a result of conceptualising and delivering online asynchronous virtual reality courses since 1995. This has led me to the development of the subjective academic narrative that recognises all academic discourse as personal (subjective), learned discourse academic) and a story (narrative) thus overcoming traditional linear patriarchal models of knowledge within the academy.

Keywords: Creativity; Eteaching and Elearning; Reality Shows; Egames

Critical Framework

The Canadian academic Gregory Ulmer (1989) identifies a 'mystorical' approach to thinking and research. A 'mystory' puts under erasure all claims to fact/authenticity in writing. It shows all writing to be both personal and mysterious (my story and mystery) whatever its claims to authenticity and depersonalisation. It reveals the academic text to be sewn together as a compilation of the scholarly, the anecdotal or popular, and the autobiographical. It questions the dominant analytico-referential model of knowledge. At the same time it accords with much late 20th and early 21st century thinking about the self, the culture and even the world as a text to be constructed and read.

Gregory Ulmer's mystorical approach opens up the text to many possible readings: there is no 'one way'. Thus even the act of writing, much less the lived experience of being, displays itself as non-authoritative in the conventional sense. The implications of this are manifold. For me, perhaps the most important-and the most galvanising-is that the

academic life and academic writing and language are now able to be seen as open, explorative and aware of their own evanescent nature in the same way as any other form of written or lived discourse. That is, academic writing can be understood as related to and made up of multiple ways of respecting various personal experiences: as a subjective academic narrative.

Introduction

In this paper, I propose that our students in this 21st century come from a different cultural background from any that has ever existed previously. Increasingly, they are the children of a global electronic technology. This is particularly important for teachers of writing to take into account as easy access to a computer means that anyone can be globally published. It also seems to mean that everyone is a writer/author/eproducer if they choose to become one. The disruption of authority in writing that arises from Postmodernism initially engaged me. Now I fear that it may contribute to illiteracy driven by the accessibility of the 'e'. Roland Barthes (1977)

confronted the authority of the writer. Barthes disrupted the accepted mode of authorship to famously declare that the author as god was dead and that no text of any kind could come to life without the active interpretations of individual readers coming from particular times, places and cultural environs.

Initially the relevance of critical and cultural theories on textuality and discourse to the World Wide Web was very clear, as the web was almost entirely text based. There was very little use of the multimedia functions it offers. As the programs have become more accessible and the technology improved, so the abilities and confidence of the users of electronic devices have developed. Now the personal computer is no longer merely a sophisticated typewriter, and the electronic text has become the hypertext. Furthermore, reality has been enriched by hyper-reality and virtual reality, and the user has become what Roland Barthes called the 'writerly-reader' in a very particular way: the electronic writer is the producer/enactor of the text rather than the consumer of the text.

This raises some very particular questions that we might ask about our e-literate students of writing. These include: does the death of the author also signal the death of the creative writer, the film-maker, the photographer and so on? Are the narratives that individuals produce from their own lives and experiences able to match those of the novelist, the theorist, the academic, the teacher, the thinker and the producer who is valued by a large artistic, academic and literary community? Does the global possibility of the blog (see later), for example, somehow raise the trite and everyday unreflected upon experiences of the individual to the levels that engaged those who read literature, or make or appreciate art and music? Surely the idea of the 'writerly-reader' is quite debased in this e-context?

Are computers becoming more human than humans?

When Jacques Derrida (1978) introduced the idea of the human as constructed text, did this make an opening not only for thinking about our human-ness in a different way, but also for

human-ness to be construct-able and hence deconstruct-able? Once having accepted this, is there a correlative that the cyborg is another manifestation of this unhuman-human-ness? That is to say, it is indeed another rung for us to climb up the techno-evolutionary ladder beyond that of textuality and discourse. Except, of course, it will not be us as humans who are climbing this ladder: it will be computers as humans. (Arnold 2001; 2002)

Why then are we working so consistently towards replacing ourselves? Perhaps it is truly a function of Western colonisation moving from geographic territories, now reclaimed by westernised 'natives', to cyberspace. This domain is ripe for colonisation. Ziauddin Sarder postulates that cyberspace is the '*darker side of the West*'. (In Bell and Kennedy: 732-752) Not only does he see it as an expression of the deepest angst of the Western male, it is also '*...resolutely being designed as a new market and it is an emphatic product of the culture, world-view and technology of Western civilization.*' (734)

The Self as Cyborg

The term 'cyborg' refers to human beings becoming a combination of the cyber and the organic. The force within it seeks a meaning as to how humans are absorbing new electronic technologies into their lives and even being. It was coined by Donna Haraway in 1985 and reached a wide audience through her book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the reinvention of nature* in 1991. Today, the word nature need not come in to the robotic possibilities of reinventing ourselves through technology. In his essay '*Machine Metaphysics*', Tofts says that '*...human interface technology is prompting some significant re-thinking of ancient questions concerning the nature of being.*' He argues that cybernetics first sought to understand human behaviour through analogies with computer technology and then asks the 'frightening' question: '*...what if our machines can become human?*' (1999: 12)

When we consider what it is to teach and learn about writing in the digital media culture, we see that Tofts's question is both challenging and appropriate. Consider that Professor of cybernetics, Kevin Warwick (2004) envisages

a future where humans will be a subspecies of the cyber and the 'real' humans will be networked. He has himself wired his nervous system to a computer, and become aware that he may be hacked into. He warns that '*...the day will come when computer viruses can infect humans as well as PCs.*'

The technologically improved human being can be readily understood when we consider, for example, artificial limbs, pacemakers and even hearing aids or glasses. The cyber-machine-as-human goes far beyond this and challenges subjectivity and a sense of human essence not only philosophically, but also in practice. The cyber as textuality and discourse introduces a new concept of what it is to be a writer or a teacher of writing.

How does the internet provide a new public sphere for the individual to write?

Is globalisation really the creation of an ecommunity? Are our students coming from local experiences that can be re-constructed or even thought about in multiple ways? Are they connected with others in ways that we couldn't even conceptualise before the WWW became accessible in 1994? (Burnett <http://www.eciad.bc.ca/~rburnett/Bas.htm>.)

These are some of the questions to be considered regarding the provision of a personal narrative within a new technology that's often accused of participating in technological determinism. Whilst many of these have implications for fair use and copyright, this capitalist implication is not their greatest cost. Perhaps the most significant question for the teaching of writing is the interesting question of the displacement of the professional: the author/ity.

The parallel life/narrative of literature that enhances the readers' understandings of self and society has provided us with recognizable life stories that enlighten, amuse, confound and delight us as readers and as writers. Is the local and immanent reproduced online somehow more 'real' than the study of what used to be termed 'the arts'? Our elite students come to us from a technical and gaming background that shows everything is possible in authorship,

but that also displays that there is much authorship that is empty: about nothing considered, or from higher-order thinking processes. Above all, perhaps, are we now all cyber-writers within the own new genre of 'myspace'?

Is the 'e' like an electronic construction of self as writer?

The artist Andy Warhol predicted that we would all feel really alive when we had our 15 minutes of fame on the public communication systems. Are the new technologies capable of providing a positive interactive global social life that enhances reality by bringing it together with cyberspace opportunities? Or are our students alienated from the past and even the 'real' or non-virtual present by the immediate and shallow pleasures of trite electronic communications and self-constructions?

<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/nwe/DK/borg.htm>.

Certainly, the new electronic technologies display the yearning that the individual has to be seen and heard and, perhaps above all, to be empowered. In doing so, the 'e' is completely in accord with the ideas of Roland Barthes about the death of the author, and finds Jacques Derrida's interest in deconstruction of the notion/claim for 'reality' a very useful tool

Many argue that the 'e' provides a global freedom that enhances and even enables the democratic formation of the self within the culture. This assertion of self goes beyond group security as the net helps build identity from a sense of 'we' to a sense of 'self': '*...the internet helps promote what are called alternative or counter public spheres that can offer a new, empowering sense of what it is to be a citizen*' ((de Donk 2004: xiii).

At the heart of this matter is the relationship between the 'real' and the 'virtual' in the contemporary moment. In what ways are these compatible? Is it possible to deconstruct this binary through new technological modes that facilitate the electronic construction of self as text as real and life-enhancing? (Kellner)

Is such a proposition as this able to be likened to literary/artistic/cultural narratives that construct a parallel narrative to life so that readers may more fully understand themselves? For a significant purpose of the creative arts is not merely to assert a definition/ position of the self but also to provide the experiences of fictional truth that we can undertake to our own advantage at, as it were, one remove.

The core question seems to be: 'How do we get to understand ourselves as writers in the new electronic spaces with the new electronic devices?

The handheld electronic program selector

Perhaps the most common mode of self-inscription today is involved in the use of the handheld electronic program selector that enables us to 'surf' the offerings on T.V. What occurs in real time when we do this is that we set our own program for watching television. We can move from station to station every second to enact in our living rooms the famous fractured discourse or 'pastiche' so beloved to postmodernists.

The hand that holds the zapper rules the television program selection. More than this, it produces highly individualized viewers who look at television in a particular way not envisaged by the programs printed for viewer selections. This has now been enhanced to allow such interactions with the screen as stop, rewind, store etc.

Television remains the most pervasive technological influence on young people today. In their teenage years, 94% of young people confirm that they 'quite like' watching television, 81% using the internet and 72% playing computer games (Woolcott 2002 p.18).

Reality TV shows

The 'e' certainly involves the production of self. It blurs the historical distinctions between fictional and real representations: '*...the real itself and its ethnographic or sociological representations are...fictions, albeit powerful ones that we do not experience as fictions but*

as true.' (Gordon 1997:11). Once we went to the creative arts, to philosophy and even psychology to try to understand our human condition. Today we gaze at 'reality' shows where individuals seek to be seen so as to affirm their existence. Why is this?

Our students are coming to us from a position of authority: they are 'the real'. In the early 21st century we saw the introduction of television shows that didn't involve actors and scripts but were the result of placing a group of people into supposedly real-life or simulated situations and recording their actions. There was no real script and no prepared dialogue. The director was not in evidence and camera work was the servant of the voyeur-viewer producing stupidity. Rather than art or entertainment, are they catering to an: '*...inine low brownness...*'? (Debelle 2005, pp9)

There is a seemingly endless proliferation of such shows. They are among the most watched of T.V. shows! (<http://www.realitytvlinks.com/index2.html> shows many). Some of them have a more traditional format and have given rise to fame such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* or *Judge Judy*. The more harmless ones help you to buy a house or watch you sell one; they may even lead to helpful behaviour negotiations with self or others, even if it's all displayed to the world. There is, however, a very dark side to 'reality T.V.'. Many shows simply ridicule the combatants, others diminish them psychologically or trash them physically. Free-to-air T.V. has many examples of such shows and has done very well with this format. Of course, they proliferate on pay T.V. which indicates that people are prepared to pay directly to participate in voyeuristic 'reality' shows.

Such reality shows don't teach our students anything about writing and creativity at all. Creative presentations are carefully crafted to provide parallel narratives that enhance our personal experiences through the imagination. Reality shows take away the imaginative transaction of dialogue and characterisation and place the siting of the creative artefact within a framework that claims to be

completely 'real' even though it's manifestly a simulcrum.

What then do we make of it as teachers of writing in the 21st century? What do our students, weaned on such an 'inane low browness' make of the intellectual lives we offer and hope to cherish with and for them? We cannot merely diminish their world: we need to understand how they are formed by it and then to enable them to be informed about it.

The self, meaning and the mobile phone

The mobile phone, owned by almost all of our present students, is becoming a portable computer, television or radio that can hold manipulable information, and show and/or store and select real time transmissions. What might this mean for learning and teaching about writing, and for writing itself, in the 21st century?

The mobile phone is even more ubiquitous than the television because it's handheld and transportable. Its many functions quite transcend the mere contact between two conversationalists that occur through the landline. To the young in particular, the mobile phone is a significant and even central accessory that enables virtual communities to exist at the touch of buttons. Without ignoring its multiple attributes (such as the potential for displaying visuals, connecting to more formal infotainment networks, and marking the position of an individual at any time) perhaps its most significant contemporary feature is that of texting.

Texting is a dominant feature in the communication of youth groups. It enables the formation of virtual communities that keep in contact with almost obsessive regularity. It also facilitates less desirable elements such as electronic bullying, and has been infamously involved in bringing pack rapists together.

Texting communities use a web-based interface to send messages to mobile phone groups. These groups might be set up by people known to one another, or could be a service for putting profiled groups together such as a dating service.

As well as being a useful device in such tragic situations as the 2005 terrorist attacks on London trains, the mobile phone is also the future in respect to stored radio/audio. Podcasting, or RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is currently delivered via the internet to the hard drive. Relevant programs are easy to install. It's found through indexes, search engines or directories. The production values vary from the crude personal audio through to commercial radio. People produce and/or listen to podcasts because they fulfil their passionate interests such as beer (beercasting) or religion (godcasting) or because they can download it in their own time. There are copyright issues for commercial presentations that use music, for example...many non-commercial operators simply ignore this. The delivery of such audio to the mobile phone is currently the subject of much technical investigation. It emphasizes the phone as the future communication vehicle in most areas of the 'e'. Most of our students have their most intimate friendships with and on the mobile phone: they publish themselves daily and inexorably on it. Does this make them writers? Does this offer them a publication outlet as writers?

The iphone

Already young people in particular live in virtual communities through their mobile phones and increasingly in chatrooms or their own blogs or websites. This globalisation is intrinsic to living in advance western technological societies and can readily be seen to disfranchise others.

In January 2007, Jeremy Roche was present at a meeting with Greg Joswiak, Apple's Vice President of iphone products. He writes of the 2 iphones on display that they are '*...one of the most elegant and ravishing phones I've seen so far, due largely to its simple, sleek design and impeccable, intuitive user interface.*' (2007:1)

The iphone is easily held in the hand, and can be turned side-on for access as a wide screen which Roche reports as '*bright, colourful and seems like very high resolution for its size.*' (2007:2)

This new information and communication technology means that we have even more ways of constructing ourselves in cyberspace. With the introduction of the iPhone, sure to be first of many such technologies, the world is growing even smaller and we can communicate both by receiving and sending with greater facility. The virtual communities that already reinforce or even replace face-to-face meetings will become more compulsive through this technology. Through the iPhone and similar technologies, it's quite probable that we will redefine ourselves as humans as well as writers due to the transformative nature of the 'e'.

The self and electronic revelations: blogging; vlogging

Web logs were, until quite recently, the result of electronic nerds revealing themselves on their own websites because they had enough knowledge to use the technology in this way. Today that scenario is undergoing rapid reconstruction as weblogs become known by the familiar and somehow robotic but reassuring term of 'blogging'. The increasing 'e' interest in the minutiae of everyday lives was initially a confronting voyeurism for which the voyeur paid. Today such autobiographic writing examples that display yourself online physically, politically, psychologically and emotionally, are increasing rapidly.

Blogs are usually self-published websites that utilize both the immediacy and the multimedia of electronic discourse. They may also be considered as sites of contestation where ideas and comments not acceptable to mainstream publications with their big-business connections and political affiliations are made globally public. Unfortunately such revolutionary possibilities for thinking as it were e-new are too often subsumed into the prosaic, the everyday and the unreflected upon.

Photoblogs are regularly updated, as the name suggests, with photographs and/or have photos as an integral part of the blog. Through mobile web logging or 'moblogging', content can also be published on the World Wide Web using a phone device.

Multimedia construction of self is clearly seen in the relatively new art of vlogging. Jeff Jarvis (<http://buzzmachine.com/>) is the first vlogger. He talks into a video camera about news, his ideas and viewpoints and what he considers entertainment, digitizes and then puts it online.

Vlogs provide an outlet for more than information and personal attitudes. They also allow for artistic expression in a number of mediums. Nevertheless, their main attraction would still seem to be a kind of voyeurism into the theatre of an individual life.

Blogging is a new form of immediacy and personality in journalistic reportage. Bloggers on site...such as in Iran...practise a form of participative journalism that is neither objective nor impartial. Nor does it claim to be other than the blogger's unedited experiences. Mainstream media is beginning to allow such blogs as a complementary part of editorially controlled reportage. Blogging, then, is a personalization of observed experiences shared unconditionally online with an imagined audience. Thus representation and interpretation are drawn closely together, and the authority of the text is recognized as the reading of the text rather than the writing of it: it is intrinsically a piece of readerly-writing articulated and practiced in a way never envisaged by Roland Barthes.

Time shifting

Until the 21st century, education was embedded within time. Today, the e-world is a-synchronous in its nature. This deeply influences our students. They come from a world in which timeshifting allows you to watch the transmission as you are recording it for future reference, to pause live T.V., to rewind it and to watch elements of a transmission as you wish to. This provides interactivity and requires either a Personal Computer (P.C) with relevant programs or a Personal Video recorder (PVR). Because a company called TiVo make the equipment, this has become known as a TiVo. A PVR is an electronic device that digitizes television shows and places them on a hard disc. The advantages of this over DVD recording for later viewing are extra convenience and the ability to interact so as to pause live T.V. for

closer viewing and/or skipping ads. Corporate broadcasters themselves encourage this technology and are involved in providing timeshifting capacities. The commercial downside is that this can also lead to a denial to allow ads or an automatic expiration time for the storage of the transmission.

Timeshifting is another way of asserting individual choice within the constricts of commercial presentations. It again exemplifies the empowerment of the 'reader' to bring the text to life. However, Barthes's once-revolutionary ideas about the death of the author never envisaged that there would not be a creator of the text who had something to offer the reader. In his 'the author is dead' scenario, there is a combination: the discourse is actually produced by the reader while the text is authored by a creator. Today the author/blogger is the reader/user, and timeshifting has become a way to cut and stick individual writings and readings.

File sharing music

The music industry has provided a particular example of the use of the internet to download music and make your own selection of CD Roms or DVD's to play. This also provides bloggers and people swapping their own taste of music (files sharing) with a way to repackage music produced by the Music Industry. Indeed, at '*...any given time you can find 719,280,000 MP3 files through Kazaa.*' (Factor 2003.p.8.), and Australian legal history was made in 2005 when this was decalred illegal.

The Record Industry of America is currently pursuing 261 test cases against downloading music from the www '*...including the un-edifying suing of a twelve year-old girl for copying nursery rhymes.*' (Factor 2003 p.1) The music industry is protecting itself by introducing copy coding to try to prevent the downloading of music and the construction of individualized CD's. Yet music consumers now want to have the sound of music around on different portable platforms. (Factor 2003.p.8) Clearly, the writer of music and lyrics is no longer authoritative in its distribution and use. Of course this also means that electronic changes and different uses can

be made of music and even musical sounds. This introduces a challenging sense of authorship.

Webcam

The powerful use of the electronic camera that shoots for the computer screen is now readily available in itself and can be distributed via simple programs that are easily downloaded. This is used extensively in a number of real-life real-time transmissions such as 'sportscams' on umpires or an interesting type of virtual prostitution comparable to visual phone sex. The women involved in this area of 'the sex industry' are called 'camgirls'. Many cams are left on buildings to transmit life on the streets. The most 'hit upon' of these include The Eiffel Tower cam and New York City traffic cam.

The cam brings globalisation and the individual closely together: does it act to construct a new reality, or does it act to destroy the individual? Does globalisation act as a cancer, a vertigo, perhaps a fatal displacement of cultural certainties that disrupt writing as we understand it? Jean Baudrillard sees it as: '*...the product of a system that tracks down any form of negativity and singularity, including of course death as the ultimate form of singularity*' (2002:2)

Is this 'e' innately self-destructive of the individualism of the electronic construction of self that it perhaps paradoxically promises? Certainly, Baudrillard is very negative about the new technologies and their fracturing of old cultural certainties. He sees the action of singularities as beating globalisation. However, he warns that they are themselves so fractured that they don't offer a realistic alternative and may even lead to terrorism: (2002:2) Is it possible to argue that blurring of reality into the electronic world is a fascinating by-product of the empowerment of the individual over the text? (see: <http://www.realityblurred.com/>) For us as teachers of writing, this has significant implications.

Chat rooms

One of the first indications of the urge to authorship and authority over self was the introduction of online virtual groups who most often met in dedicated chatrooms.

A chatroom is a global virtual community of people around a shared interest from academic interests and learning to personal experiences. Chatrooms provide an online forum where like minded people can meet according to rules set down by group agreement and kept up to scratch by a moderator. They usually occur in text and in real time. They provide a very useful outlet for legitimate communities that are acceptable to most people. At the same time their international reach provides for very idiosyncratic individuals to meet across the globe. They are also the place in which sexual preying can occur and are a basis for pedophile rings.

The virtual reality of chatrooms provides our students with multiple inputs that vie with T.V., radio, pod/blog/vog etc casting and the authoritative web of knowledge that higher order thinking demands and that is most easily accessed through learning from and with teachers. It is the latter that is on the periphery today. The question that we as teachers must ask of the 'e' is how do we understand it and utilize its strengths with our elite students to enable their literacy in other arenas?

Podcasting: eSelecting own program schedule on radio or D.J'ing the self

The implications of arranging one's own information and perhaps transforming it into knowledge are manifold for us as teachers. Today, many communications industries are building ways to facilitate individualization and yet make a profit. The electronic self-selection of programs has been noted, of course, by professional and commercial providers in television and radio. Today commercial radio is developing radio with pictures, radio that can be stored and then downloaded at different times from the original presentation and radio that can be selected by the listeners at a time and place convenient to themselves. Again, this is

increasingly the 'norm' for our elite student cohort.

Hypereality and the manipulation of images

Our students come to us without the assuredness of the cultural construction: they know that everything can be digitally altered. For example, programs such as photoshop allow the creation of individualised reality photographs. These new programs enable the manipulation of images in ways that the still or filmic camera have not permitted. Actual photographs can be manipulated, but virtual reality pictures can also appear as lifelike experiences that our own natural life tells us are too extraordinary to be real. These special effects that rely for their creation on algorithms appear to produce a new understanding of ourselves as humans.

Such synthetic photographs and visuals draw upon our cultural belief in the reality of the pictorial record. This is encompassed in the saying that 'one picture is worth a thousand words' that underpins traditional photography and cultural experiences such as the television news. Goran Sonesson calls this a 'truth witness' view of photography that validates our reception of synthesized hyper-real visual texts. He foresees a time, probably now with us, that '*...the synthetic picture becomes as common as the photograph; then we will be forced to abandon this more and more improbable presupposition of the existence of a previous relation of proximity between the motive and the picture.*' (1998(b) p. 2) That time has come. It can be clearly seen in the predominance of electronic games.

The appearance of reality enacted through the interactivity involved in computer games and the manipulation of images is becoming a significant experience of gamers. The manipulation of images is the basis of electronic games playing. This experience of virtual reality is compelling. In games, the player experiences a reality that is only accessible through electronic media. Such hyper-reality is also experienced as a three dimensional pictorial yet real interactivity.

The once internal contradiction in the term 'virtual reality' is drawn together in electronic games playing: it is the object of the game to move the self as performative character, or the real self in virtual reality, from the beginning through many obstacles and choices to the successful conclusion or to one of many possible 'endings'.

In three dimensional interactivity, the players see objects from many angles, move in and out of range to close ups or broad views, perform actions and interactions both with the characters or envisualisations and with the performative gaming itself, make choices and introduce new elements, and generally act to produce a synthetic picture within a virtual reality that is becoming less and less identifiable as not real. Sonesson has his own warning about this: *'The time has come in which we may all, Like Wu-tao-tze, paint a picture on the prison wall and enter it. But it remains to be seen whether another prison is awaiting us on the other side of the landscape.'* (p6)

Certainly games appear to reassure the player that they have skills in virtual reality that are non-existent in their own capacities. For example, in one game the player has to make the protagonist (who is and is not the player) make six notes on a flute to proceed to the next level. Even if the players cannot play the flute, this virtual interaction persuades them that they can. Yet when they leave the game, this capacity is left behind. They cannot really do what they seem to do.

Conclusion

Cultural ideologies are the unspoken 'givens' that tend to 'glue' the social group together. The ways in which we seek meaning through writing are also the ways in which we can identify the fragility of meaning that comes from the construction of the culture.

The Indian cultural theorist Gayatri Spivak says of this: *'...leaders read the world in terms of rationality and averages, as if it were a textbook. The world actually writes itself with the many-leveled, unfixable intricacy and*

openness of a work of literature. (Spivak, 1988:95)

Storytelling leads us to a fictional truth. It allows us to divorce from 'realities' and develop possibilities: it is creative. Such a reading of the world challenges the established confines of cultural 'givens'. It also introduces us with felicity to possibilities that arise with this idea of reading the world like literature. Seeing the world as a literary construction traditionally involves exploring such things as: ideas placed in a complex many-layered story; the development of intricate characterisation in its plot; an identifiable text and teasing out a subtext underpins all that is obvious. In this postmodern moment it also offers ideas of challenging the authority of the text by reading against the givens, by identifying how it is constructed through the experiences that the reader brings to it.

If, however, our elite students have found no fictional reality in literature, how can they see it as a model for the ways that their world works? Has the 'e' closed down the possibilities that the theories so enlightening for me opened up in my thinking, writing, learning and teaching?

I think that it is clear that one who can see 'the emperor has no clothes on' can also understand the 'death of the author'. Roland Barthes who famously or infamously declared 'The author is dead' meant that the emphasis on the interchange of ideas in writing had moved from the author...the authoritative voice...to the reader.

Our 21st century students come from an electronic background that introduces totally new ways of constructing self and society. Their cultural backgrounds are totally different from those that formed and informed us as teachers.

Jean Baudrillard (2002) argues that the much-touted globalisation that is everywhere utilizing the prefix 'e' is a form of slavery, albeit benevolent oppression. He sees it as having led to the humiliation of the non-western world because non-westerners are seen

to receive and never permitted to give. It has also led to the humiliation of the self in the West because we, too, are '...in the irredemiable situation of having to receive, always to receive, no longer from God or nature, but by means of a technological mechanism of generalized exchange and common gratification.' (p.4) He sees us as in despair because we have submitted to '...an omnipotent technology, to a crushing virtual reality, to an empire of networks and programs that are probably in the process of redrawing the regressive contours of the entire human species, of a humanity that has gone 'global'. (2002.p.4.) I don't see many students of writing succumbing to such despair, and the challenge is for us as teachers of writing is to overcome it and make the 'e' a learning delight as well as a place in which the author comes to life.

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