

Writing through Visual Acts of Reading: Incorporating Visual Aesthetics in Integrated Writing and Reading Tasks

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When asked to explain the connection between writing and reading, it may be tempting to draw upon the seemingly commonsensical assumption that good writers are good readers. This is implied in Louise Rosenblatt's (2004) transactional theory of writing, in which the writer, who is the first reader of the text, transacts with the text emerging on the page. What Rosenblatt describes as "authorial reading" suggests that better writers are also better critical readers, able to assess the effectiveness of their own work. Further studies related to the writing and reading connection, which came into prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, propose that there are benefits in connecting writing tasks to reading activities.

These may be characterized in terms of three main benefits (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). The first benefit is communicative awareness based on the idea that writing and reading are communicative activities, and as writers transact with their work, they perform the role of critical readers of their own texts; similarly, as readers transact with texts, they rewrite them, thus performing the role of authors (Nystrand, 1986; Rosenblatt, 2004). Hence, connecting writing and reading activities facilitates a student's ability to weave in and out of dual roles as writers and readers. The second benefit is functional in nature. Timothy Shanahan (1997) proposes an integrated literacy instruction involving writing-reading thematic units so that students' issue-based readings provide a platform for their written responses. The third benefit emphasizes shared cognitive processes between writing and reading. It is here that the research provides a strong argument concerning the powerful effects of integrated writing-reading instruction since writing and reading share particular forms of knowledge including metaknowledge (knowledge about the purposes and functions of writing and reading), domain knowledge about specific content, knowledge about universal text attributes (such as graphophonics and syntax), and procedural knowledge involving skills on how to access and communicate knowledge (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). More recently, Giovanni Parodi's (2007) empirical study of the correlation between writing and reading provides convincing evidence of the common cognitive knowledge-based strategies involved in writing and reading tasks assigned to students.

Paradoxically, while early studies in the 1960s and 1980s confirm that better writers tend to be better readers and that they tend to read more compared to poorer writers (Langer & Flihan, 2000), later studies reveal several contradictions. Various empirical studies in the 1990s showed how writing activities or instructional programs led to little improvement in reading comprehension (Shanahan & Tierney, 1991). This is aligned with other studies which argue that there is little connection between reading prolifically and writing well. For

example, Judith Langer's (1986) study concludes that it is over-simplistic to assume that writing and reading are similar activities. She states that "[t]hrough reading and writing share common language routines and reasoning strategies, they involve quite different approaches to meaning making, even when topics are parallel" (p. 25). What this suggests is that the relationship between writing and reading is far more complex than earlier researchers have imagined and further research therefore needs to establish the connection between the two, particularly in examining how writing draws upon reading experiences.

In addition to these contradictory findings, one of the key challenges educational researchers face in exploring the possible integration of writing and reading in the classroom is the current dichotomy between language and literature, composition and reading in academic institutions as well as in schools. For example, Shanahan (1990) notes these distinctions:

I have personally observed classrooms in which reading and writing instruction and activity take place in different parts of the room, at different times of the day, with different types of teacher involvement and different materials. The psychological connections of reading and writing are often neglected in such situations as well. (p. 3)

More recent surveys of writing and reading practices across schools in the United States show that a large percentage of classrooms continue to teach writing and reading separately (Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Also, Marguerite Helmers (2003) observes that while critical theory continues to have a significant influence on the teaching of literature in schools, it has not filtered into the world of the composition classroom. Judith Langer and Sheila Flihan (2000) term these separate practices of writing and reading part of a "conceptual and disciplinary schism" (p. 1). They argue that this schism has occurred because writing and reading developed from different traditions. For example, the teaching of writing evolved from classic Aristotelian rhetoric which focused on style, grammar, delivery in contrast to the teaching of reading and literature which evolved from religious studies in eighteenth century England (Langer & Flihan, 2000; Eagleton, 1996). Thus, on the one hand, writing instruction has tended to focus on form, such as the construction of grammatically correct sentences, context such as writing according to expected generic codes for a specific purpose, and language-learning processes such as scaffolding the process of writing through pre-writing and "gateway" activities (Langer & Applebee, 1986; Russell, 1997; Hillocks, 1995). On the other hand, reading instruction has tended to place emphasis on a study of a body of literary texts associated with more abstract concepts related to imagination, aesthetics, and culture.

In England, these concepts became related to literature only in the nineteenth century. Previously, literature was associated with the condition of being able to read. According to Raymond Williams (1977), literature in the eighteenth century was a new specialization in the field of rhetoric and grammar and was considered separate from the area of writing. In other words, to engage in literature implied passive reading as opposed to the composition of words on a page. Gradually, as England began to expand her empire in the nineteenth century, there was a pressing need to create a unified culture through a form of intellectual and moral education. Literature education was therefore seen as an appropriate platform to uphold the ideals of "Englishness" which represented the ideological values of the ruling elite (Eagleton, 1996). This marks a shift in the goals of literature education from teaching students to read to teaching students to acquire a certain taste for the aesthetic uses of language (Williams, 1977).

More recently, the influence of cultural studies into the field of literary studies has further problematized the writing-reading schism. By the 1960s, courses and programs in the

United States began to appear in universities that consolidated a sense of the importance of representing the texts and traditions of minority populations and communities (Spivak, 2003). These paved the way for the introduction of new courses in English Literature departments including film theory, popular culture, visual/media studies, etc. The study of literature has therefore expanded beyond the western canon to include texts of other cultures and groups.

Additionally, the notion of “text” has expanded to include other forms beyond the printed word, such as visual, media, and new media texts. This has led educators to emphasize the acquisition of multimodal literacy in schools involving the ability write and read through multiple communicative modes such as words, image, and sound. At the same time, multimodal literacy is part of the discourse of the 21st century that also includes information literacy, critical literacy, visual literacy, digital literacy, and media literacy. These are often termed “new” literacies in order to mark a distinction from the older form of print-centered literacy. In a key position paper on a pedagogy of multiliteracies, the New London Group (1996) outlines, among other things, six design elements – linguistic design, visual design, audio design, gestural design, spatial design and multimodal design – which comprise the metalanguage of multiliteracies to be incorporated into the school curriculum. Part of multimodal literacy education involves learning how these various modes of communication contribute to the overall message (Kress & Jewitt, 2003).

In this paper, I aim to propose a resolution to the two challenges outlined above: the writing-reading schism and the challenge of multimodality. In the first part of the paper, I begin by examining the growing significance of visual aesthetics in reading practices especially in influencing particular reading positions. The next section of the paper then discusses the implications of aesthetic or representational composition as a strategy to address the writing-reading schism while also addressing the challenge of infusing multimodality in writing instruction.

The Role of Visual Aesthetics in Reading Practices

Two observations may be made about texts in the domain of public communication. The first is that whereas writing was the dominant mode of communication a few centuries ago, it has now been replaced by the dominance of the image (Kress, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). In an examination of learning materials in schools such as textbooks, web-resources and teacher-produced materials, Gunther Kress and JeffBezemer (2008) note that images have overtaken writing as primary carriers of meaning. In science and mathematics textbooks, for example, illustration and pictures play an eminent role in clarifying complex concepts described in words. The second observation is that information is no longer conveyed through one single mode but a multiplicity of modes (Freedman, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). For example, it is rare to find the front page of a newspaper consisting of only words or only images, but rather a combination of both. Furthermore, if one were to read the news from the internet, one would probably find that the information is presented through various combinations of words, images, sound and video.

The dominance of the image and the multimodal nature of texts may also be observed in contemporary youth culture. Bill Osgerby (2004) cites reports that in the United States, youths between eight to eighteen years of age spend an average of seven hours a week on electronic media such as television, computers and video games. This is comparable to the time spent on these activities by youths in Britain. The question remains – how have young peoples’ engagements with multimodal texts influenced their reading practices? I suggest that there are two significant ways:

From reading the text to reading the aesthetic design of text

Recent discussions on new literacies largely center on the acquisition and learning of particular skills associated with communication in a social and cultural context (Nixon, 2003; Unsworth, 2004). In a recent paper on media education in the 21st century, Henry Jenkins (2006) argues for the need to develop new competencies and social skills such as play (the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings), distributed cognition (the ability to interact meaningfully with tools that expand mental capacities) and transmedia navigation (the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities). In other studies, Renee Hobbs (2003, 2007) links media literacy instruction to the development of critical reading skills such as comprehension; analysis of points of view, omission, representation and construction techniques; and evaluative skills such as compare and contrast. What appears to be lacking in the discussions on new literacies is the notion of "literariness" involving the aesthetic quality of the constructed text. Rosenblatt (1994) makes a distinction between efferent reading and aesthetic reading:

All reading is carried on in a matrix of experienced reading: efferent reading gives attention primarily to the referent alone; aesthetic reading places the experienced meaning in the full light of awareness and involves the selective process of creating a work of art. (p. 75)

Thus, efferent reading fulfils the utilitarian function of comprehending the text while aesthetic reading fulfils the transcendental function of experiencing the text, and an ideal pedagogical approach would be inclusive of both. This leads to the question of how a critical reading of texts can be balanced with a critical appreciation of the ways in which texts are designed to create particular effects. In this light, writing instruction needs to account for aesthetic readings of texts in addition to efferent readings.

An aesthetic reading of texts involves what Carey Jewitt (2005) terms a "reconfiguration" since the inclusion of image within print texts changes the dynamics of its reading so that design and compositional aspects of the text are surfaced. The result, according to Kress (2003), is that language and literacy have become partial barriers of meaning:

The theoretical change is from linguistics to semiotics – from a theory that accounted for language alone to a theory that can account equally well for gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, color, music and no doubt others. Within that theory, the language-modes – speech and writing – will also have to be dealt with semiotically, they are now part of the whole landscape of the many modes available for representation. (p. 36)

Semiotics, or the "science that studies the life of signs" (de Saussure, 1974, p. 962) implicitly involves not just an analysis of the linguistic text, but the design or construction of the text as well. In other words, a reading of a multimodal text involves an understanding of the content (what the individual words or images mean) but also how they have been deliberately arranged by the author. Theo Van Leeuwen (2005) uses the term "framing" to describe how meaning is surfaced through the connection or disconnection of elements within the text. For example, in a painting, meaning surfaces through the reader's ability to connect various objects, symbols, and references within the text; conversely, meaning can also occur as a result of tension or a disconnect among these elements in the text. Thus, a critical reading of the text, which may begin with the reader's analysis of the content of the text, needs to take into account the analysis of authorial intention whereby the reader begins to interrogate the author regarding his/her decisions of textual design.

From reading the text to reading the way knowledge is represented

A semiotic analysis of text cannot exist independently of social and institutional structures. The construction of a multimodal text as well as the interpretation and use of it are shaped by cultural practices. David Buckingham (2007) describes how the democratization of family relationships in England has influenced a media-rich “bedroom culture” among youths who engage in chatroom conversations, social networking via online sites such as Facebook, video games, etc., in the privacy of their rooms. Conversely, the way in which youths engage visual and media texts also affect social practices and constructions of identity. Lalitha Vasudevan (2006a) has explored how for youths, “digital and visual modalities make it possible to perform and author new selves that are not only resistant to dominant images but that offer new sites of inquiry and exploration” (p. 8). The implication is that a critical reading of texts should include an analysis of the way specific communities or groups are represented in the text and how these representations are manifested within the aesthetic composition of the text.

In summary, then, the multimodal nature of texts has ushered new ways of reading texts beyond paying attention to content or linguistic features. Essentially, a framework for critical reading of multimodal texts would take into account three domains, represented by the following figure:

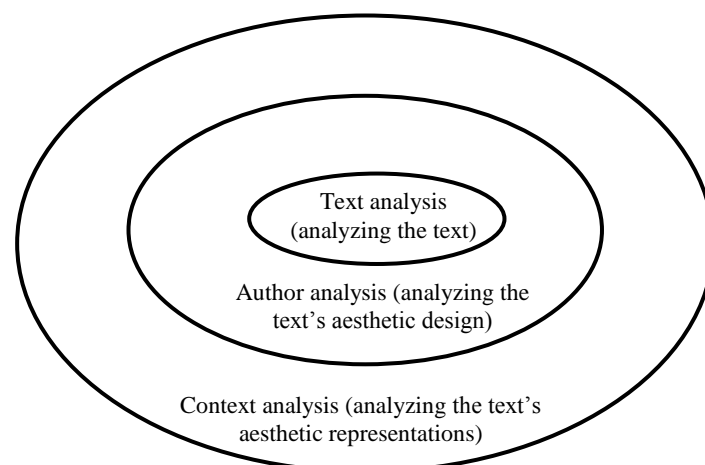


Figure 1. Framework for critical reading of multimodal texts

This framework is premised on the notion that even though students begin with an analysis of a text, the text is never seen in isolation. Rather, at more complex levels of analysis, the text is examined in the light of the author (its aesthetic design) and the social and political context through which it has been constructed (its aesthetic representations).

Implications for Writing: Writing Through Visual Acts of Reading

Textual multimodality has resulted in the intrusion of concepts of design and representation in the interpretation and analysis of texts. However, in the field of writing instruction in schools, the visual medium continues to be subordinated to verbal language (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006) with the result that writing tasks assigned in the classroom tends to be predominantly mono-modal. David Kaufer and Brian Butler (2000) suggest one reason why the teaching of composition in schools has become focused on visible language structures (grammar and genre) in contrast to a focus on the aesthetic composition as seen in other fields of compositional arts such as literature, music, drama, and film. This is because

even though sentence composition was only one facet of the rhetorical tradition, it began to gain increasing prominence when literacy became tied to the ability to read and write and to be literate afforded one a particular social and economic position in society (Williams, 1977). In the present context, then, writing practices in schools have meant the act of translating ideas into “words that assemble into sentences, sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into whole texts” (Kaufer & Butler, 2000, p.1).

The consequence is that teachers have promoted such translating practices through the explicit teaching of genre or text types in schools. One example is the teaching of writing through the five-paragraph structure, a practice introduced by French philosopher Petrus Ramus in the 16th Century which continues to be widely used by writing instructors today (Johnson et al, 2003). George Hillocks (1995) describes this form as having dominated the teaching of writing in American high schools for almost the last half of the twentieth century. A comprehensive case study of an early-career teacher, pressured by her school to teach to the test, shows how she resorts to relying on the five-paragraph essay as a formal approach to the teaching of writing (Johnson et al., 2003). Yet, her insistence on adhering to such a rigid structure resulted in formulaic instruction, so that students were merely imitating given forms rather than engaging in generative thinking or expressing themselves more creatively.

Instead of having students conform to rigid text structures in writing tasks, teachers can make use of students’ authentic and rich image-text experiences on popular online networking programs such as Facebook. Here, young people are engaged in all sorts of rich experiences such as autobiographical writing through LiveBlog, an online diary feature that allows the incorporation of video and pictures with text; writing captions based on photographs uploaded onto their webpage; writing testimonials about their friends; and writing book or movie reviews, etc. Various studies describe how teachers have attended to students’ everyday engagements with online media and multimodal texts in order to increase their interest and motivation to write (Vasudevan, 2006b) as well as to develop “academic critical practice” by having students develop a critical awareness of different audiences and corresponding code-switching skills (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994); by having students develop a deeper understanding of form and function, such as the ways in which different narrative forms in multimodal texts affect the communicative functions of these texts (Unsworth, 2005); and by having students develop meta-cognitive awareness through a reflection of their own reading and writing habits (Alverman et. al, 1999; Ramos, 2001). These activities are in contrast to a typical English lesson where the teacher provides an inauthentic task (e.g., getting students to write an argument about the dangers of oil-spills using a five-paragraph essay format). The danger of using inauthentic tasks is that students will increasingly find writing tasks in schools utterly uninteresting and irrelevant:

If schools are to equip students adequately for the new semiotic order, if they are not to produce people unable to use the new resources of representation actively and effectively, then the old boundaries between the mode of writing on the one hand, and the “visual arts” on the other, need to be redrawn. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 34)

Thus, the challenge is to consider the inclusion of semiotic theory in writing instruction with particular attention to concepts of design and representation. In the following pages, I present two strategies of how writing can be taught through reading in relation to the theories of semiology.

Strategy 1: Writing through reading aesthetic design

Instead of getting students to focus on how their writing adheres to particular grammatical rules or generic conventions, teachers can get students to be aware of the aesthetic composition of the written text. This is particularly so if students are tasked to write multimodal texts. In doing so, students consider the various elements to be included within the frame of the text and the relationship among the elements within this frame. In *Rhetoric of the image*, Roland Barthes (1977) discusses two key features regarding the image-text relation – anchorage and relay. Images, according to Barthes, are polysemic, meaning they can be interpreted in any number of ways. However, when an image is accompanied by a text, the image becomes “anchored” or limited to the interpretation offered by the text (which can also be polysemic in nature, if less so). This occurs frequently in captions of photographs. Sometimes, the relationship between text and image is complementary. Barthes terms this “relay” by suggesting that both text and image carry different meanings which work together to contribute to the text’s overall meaning.

How can this be applied to the writing process? In designing multimodal texts, students will need to consider the different roles or functions of each mode included in the text: image, text, sound, etc. The semiotic modes should not be regarded as repetitive. Rather, each mode should draw upon the potentialities it can offer in contributing to the overall meaning of the text. According to Kress & Bezemer (2008), writing offers syntactic, grammatical and lexical resources; speech offers pitch, pitch variation, tonal quality and intensity (loudness); and image offers resources such as color, space, spatial relations, and movement.

By considering the aesthetics of the text--in this case, the way in which particular elements are selected and arranged for an intended effect--students will first need to perform a coded reading of each element. In other words, writing occurs through a reading of the multimodal components of the text. Some examples of tasks that could be assigned to students include photo-journalism, photographic poetry, or writing an introduction to be included within a CD cover. In photo-journalism, teachers can get students to analyze the text using the following guided questions:

1. How do words function to “anchor” and give an interpretation of an image?
2. How do words function to “relay” or contribute to the meaning of an image?
3. Where will the image be placed in relation to the words and why?
4. How much of the frame-space will the image occupy compared to the words?
5. Is the focal point of the text on the image or on its words and why?

The advantage of focusing on the aesthetic composition of image and words is that it empowers students by placing them in the position of composers of texts. This gives them the space to explore creative potentials of sign systems and takes the pressure away from having to focus on grammatical or structural accuracy. The creation of the text becomes an open-ended rather than close-ended activity. Depending on the task given, such opportunities for aesthetic composition may also provide students the opportunity to fashion and articulate their own identities such as through the use of autobiographical photo-poems.

Strategy 2: Writing through reading aesthetic representations

In writing, knowledge takes the form of representation since ideas and concepts taken from real word referents are translated into words on a page. This is based on the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure who is regarded as the founder of semiotics. Before de

Saussure, the study of language largely involved a historical approach, tracing change and development in phonology and semantics within and between languages. De Saussure conceived of a different approach by studying language through its system of signs. The linguistic sign, according to de Saussure (1974), “is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern” (p. 10). Thus, when we read the word “tree”, a sound pattern is activated in our minds. This sound pattern is not the actual literal sound but a psychological impression of the verbal sound of the word “tree”. At the same time, what occurs is a transference of the sound pattern to a visual referent of the tree. In other words, we begin to imagine a tree at the moment we hear the concept in our minds. What de Saussure essentially posits is not only a relationship among word, sound and image, he also highlights an important point – human beings think linguistically as well as visually.

The distinction between linguistic and visual thinking was also drawn by Rudolf Arnheim (1969) who argued that while linguistic thinking relies on logical reasoning, critical thinking, and verbalization, visual thinking relies on sensory experience, perception, and visualization. In particular, visual thinking involves intuitive cognition that occurs when the observer perceives the totality of interacting components through his or her sensory experience. For example, imagine leafing through the pages of a medieval manuscript in the basement of an old library. One may become immediately conscious of the faded cover of the text, its layout and design, and the arrangement of its chapters (sight). At the same time, one may be conscious of the fragility of the book itself (touch), the environment in which it was founde.g., the musty smell of an old library (smell), and the sense of silence pervading the place (sound). Intuitive cognition is transferred to intellectual cognition when, having intuitively grasped the meaning of the text, the individual now strategically focuses on specific components. At this point, particular skills are activated – “active exploration, selection, grasping of essentials, simplification, abstraction, analysis and synthesis, completion, correction, comparison, problem-solving as well as combining, separating, putting in context” (Arnheim, 1969, p. 13).

In experimental studies incorporating the use of visual thinking in the teaching of writing to high school ESL students, visualization has shown to provide a powerful lead-in to writing programs (Choo, 2010). This involves incorporating sensory experiences as starting points and then having students explore the meta-conceptual links between images (imagined or perceived) and words. For example, in one class, the students responded to Rembrandt’s self-portraits and then applied their analyses of the design of the paintings involving frame, color, angle, dominance, etc. into designing their own written profile story of the artist.

In addition, teachers can foster stronger connections between visual and linguistic thought processes by getting students to think visually before writing. Margaret Early and Sondra Marshall (2008) conducted a study on how a teacher utilized visualization tools in a literature class consisting of ESL students which led to a written essay. The visualization strategy required students to conceptually represent key elements in the story (theme, character, style) through the symbol of a mandala, a traditional Hindu and Buddhist symbol consisting of a circle framed by a square. Using the mandala as a visual representation is based on the work of Carl Jung who used this as a tool to explore unconscious motivations. At the end of the study, 26 of the 28 student participants reported that the use of a visual as a meditating tool enabled them to better understand and appreciate the text. Mediating between the visual and the verbal, re-reading the text and writing the essay ultimately resulted in an increased proficiency in their writing. Students also reported feeling more confident about their work.

In another example, two elementary school teachers describe how they conducted an inquiry class by getting their students to study the moon every night for one month and writing journal entries based on what they saw (Rester-Zodrow & Chancer, 1997). Students were asked to not only record their findings in words but also to sketch and draw their impressions of the moon. One student wrote the following entry after the first night: “Tonight there is no moon. I feel the cold breeze brushing against my face. I also see a blanket of fog rising over the hills. I can hear the cries of the coyotes” (p. 7). In this example, moon watching functioned as a visual stimulus so that in the process of writing, the student was able to relive his experience resulting in more descriptive and detailed written language.

Writers visualize not only concepts, settings, narrative sequences but also the way in which the story may be aesthetically represented to an implied or idealized reader. Rosenblatt (2004) describes how the writer engages in a “reception-oriented authorial reading” where he/she “disassociates from the text and reads it through the eyes of potential readers [by] judging the meaning they would make in transaction with a pattern of signs” (p. 1382). Thus, the text becomes materialized through the author’s transactions with an implied reader in his/her process of writing. This materialization is even more evident during the process of engaging with multimodal texts. Essentially, multimodal texts offer the potential of reader choice which print texts cannot offer. The written text, for example, operates along a reading path that is linear and sequential, in which the reader progresses from left to right, top to bottom (Kress & Bezemer, 2008). This path influences the ordering of events so that, for example, a narrative story may begin with a problem, followed by the intensification of the conflict leading to a climax and, finally, a resolution. In a report, the most important information is presented first followed by the next most important and so on. The inclusion of images transforms linear readings to spatial readings so that the reading path may be circular, diagonal, or intersecting. The implication is that readers are offered a choice of reading paths (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). An example of this choice in comic art occurs when the reader is not provided with a dominant direction for reading (text bubbles are placed in various places). As a result, writers of multimodal texts need to consider the various reading choices within their own narrative.

Encouraging greater awareness of implied reader positions is important in the development of good writing. Research has shown that students who are taught to consider their readers produce higher quality writing than those who do not (Sperling & Freedman, 2001). In creating multimodal texts, the writer is even more compelled to consider the different reader positions which may be adopted in the reading of the text. This is particularly realized in the new and evolving field of hypertext/electronic literature. For example, the hypertext story *Deviant: The possession of Christian Shaw* by Donna Leishman (2008), published in the first volume of the Electronic Literature collection, is set in a modern-day context where tall buildings surround an empty park. The reader is free to click on any space within the frame and activating one of the many given options opens a part of the story in which the reader is provided a glimpse of the background of Christian Shaw who is based on an actual figure in history believed to have suffered from demonic possession in 1696. The author experiments with the different possibilities for her strange behavior ranging from mental illness, loneliness, to having an over-imaginative mind. In the process of navigating the space of the text, the reader is provided with seemingly disjointed glimpses into Shaw’s life and experiences. In fact, depending on which aspects of the story are activated and in which sequence, different readers are likely to experience the text and interpret it in different ways.

The creation of such a complex hypertext requires not just an awareness of the affordances of different sign systems (words, image and sound), it also requires an awareness

of the kinds of knowledge the implied reader needs. This implied or idealized reader is assumed to be one who understands the rules of hypertext navigation and is open to non-linear forms of narratives. Thus, the writer will need to consider how much information should be provided about the character, the character's background, the historical period, the character's relationships with other characters etc. without taking away the element of suspense. In addition, the writer needs to consider how this knowledge can be aesthetically positioned within the design of the image-space and which parts of the image will activate new subtexts.

The introduction of multimodal hypertext forms of literature and writing tasks in the classroom provides the opportunity for students to consider how to utilize the different resources of images and text as well as how to arrange and compose these elements aesthetically. Unlike traditional forms of writing tasks, the author's role is to make the experience of reading the text more important and compelling than its message.

In this paper, I began with an analysis of the current dichotomy between writing and reading instruction in schools as well as the emphasis on words over image in the English classroom which is at odds with the predominance of visual culture in the lives of youths. One way to resolve these contradictions is to consider the inclusion of semiotic theories and principles in writing instruction and pedagogy. This means that writing instructors will need to expand the scope of the curriculum beyond the teaching of grammar and genre to include semiotic concepts related to aesthetic composition and representation which have previously been confined to fields such as literature and other aesthetic subjects. The aim of such an approach would be to provide creative spaces in the writing classroom that would empower students to become writers as well as composers of texts.

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