



Show, not tell: The value of new media scholarship

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Abstract

In this article, I consider the changing nature of publications in relation to technology and tenure, presenting a taxonomy of scholarly publications: online scholarship, scholarship about new media, and new media scholarship. I offer a focused definition of new media texts as ones that juxtapose semiotic modes in new and aesthetically pleasing ways and, in doing so, break away from print traditions so that written text is not the primary rhetorical means. By applying this definition to scholarly online publications, readers can be better prepared to recognize and interpret the meaning-making potential of aesthetic modes used in new media scholarly texts. I conclude by offering an analysis of a scholarly new media text, “Digital Multiliteracies.”

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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2002, the major online journals in composition published a collaborative issue on electronic publishing. In that issue, several authors referenced the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s (CCCC) position statement on scholarship requirements for tenure and promotion in the field of composition. The dire tone of the statement referred to the poor economy and lack of book publication opportunities, causing tenure-track faculty and department chairs alike to wonder if tenure would still be attainable for folks without a book in hand. This statement suggested that departments reconsider the types of publications needed for tenure or advancement and to update their guidelines to include accepting scholarly works that are “observational and experimental,” both of which are deemed “important” in advancing knowledge in the field (CCCC, n.d.). Although electronic or online publication of scholarly works wasn’t mentioned directly, many authors in the collaborative issue inferred to this option and spoke of the online publications’ value as a viable option for scholarship. Many compositionists see the value of publishing online, whether they do so themselves or read texts that colleagues have published. But, the debate has not fully subsided

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as to whether online scholarship is as valuable as an article or book published by a major print journal or press. What counts as scholarship is still under the microscope. Steven Krause (2002), in his article “Considering the Values of Self-Published Web Sites,” compared the difference between print and online scholarship when he said:

Prior to the web, it was easy to determine what should or shouldn't count as scholarship: if it appeared as an article in a peer reviewed journal or if it was published as a book by a respectable press, it was definitionally “scholarship” both in the abstract sense of advancing knowledge and in the tangible sense of being worthy to count toward tenure, review, merit, and so forth.

Certainly, tenure and advancement issues play a large role in an author's decision to publish texts in an online journal. But is work published online in peer-reviewed journals still considered risky for tenure? A URL instead of a page number doesn't generally make these texts experimental anymore. Krause (2002) concurred, saying “few of us in English studies nowadays would label articles published in these places as ‘not scholarship’ for the purposes of tenure and review.” But, most authors who do publish online in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals publish texts that do not break print-bound conventions and rarely travel into an apparent experimental realm of scholarship. In response to this reliance on print-based traditions within a supposedly experimental realm of publication in online journals, I distinguish between *scholarship about new media*, which uses print conventions such as written text as the main mode of argument, and *new media scholarship*, which uses modes other than only written text to form an argument. I demonstrate the print-bound conventions of current online scholarship in journals such as *Kairos*, and argue that applying the term new media scholarship to digital texts that use print-based conventions is an inappropriate application of the term. Instead, new media scholarship should only be applied to texts that experiment with and break away from linear modes of print traditions.

New media scholarship—online scholarship that uses modes such as audio, video, images, and/or animation in addition to written text to make meaning—is fairly new in composition studies (and other fields), which might cause readers to misinterpret these texts as too artistic to satisfy scholarly conventions. I suggest, however, that new media scholarship has a necessary aesthetic component because of its designed, multimodal elements, and because these multiple modes can be read in conjunction with written text to form the text's meaning. So that authors and readers might come to expand the field's notions of what could be considered and valued as composition scholarship, I analyze a new media text, “Digital Multiliteracies” (Miles, 2002b), to show how its video-editing interface and navigational structure make meaning in ways appropriate for scholarly publication. This new media text uses strategies that could be considered experimental and removed from print traditions, which works to support and inform the author's argument.

In writing this article, I acknowledge with an uncomfortable irony that I have created a paradox—it is my intention for authors to think about and understand new media scholarship as a way to use multiple modes of communication to form persuasive meanings (and subsequently to create their own new media publications) instead of always relying on written, linear text. Yet, I am not enacting the practice I suggest. *Mea culpa*: New media scholarship is so new to humanities fields that I wanted the evidence of this linear article to point toward the exploration of new media texts as directly and conventionally as possible. Had I chosen to discuss this

issue through a new media presentation, the evidence for the necessity of moving toward new media would have had less impact. This article, remediated into new media presentation, simply could not convey the same linear, argument-based meanings because the modes in which new media texts are composed are not based in linear, print traditions. *Modes*, here and throughout, refer not to the traditional modes of writing but, rather, the semiotic elements such as video, graphics, written text, audio, and so on that a designer uses to compose multimodal or new media texts. How audiences make meaning from animated graphics, for example, is different than how they make meaning from a sentence, paragraph, or full-length article. The formation of argument in new media texts, then, becomes not a linear construction linking one sentence – meaning to a consecutive other. It is, instead, a persuasion, a juxtaposition of modal elements from which readers infer meaning. For this reason, when I use *argument* to discuss an author's or designer's intention in a new media work, I am not suggesting that her or his argument is readable in the same ways as print constructions of an argument would be. Instead, I offer argument as a term for the persuasive meaning-making elements in new media texts. In the case of the text I examine later in this article, which signals itself as a scholarly text, using argument helps me refer to the elements through which the text makes scholarly connections and meanings. It is my intention in this linear article, then, not to outline how the forms of rhetorical argument can be applied neatly to new media texts (as I don't believe they easily can), but to help readers understand the possibilities of interpreting new media scholarship so that when they approach a new media text, they can make meaning from it. And, if readers are able to realize the meanings in new media texts, next time I may take advantage of new media techniques to compose meaning in different ways. No doubt, in many cases, this is why other new media scholars choose to present their work in a print-based format. It may be time, however, to begin composing more of the so-called experimental new media texts. In the next sections, I discuss how a re-focused definition of new media scholarship will help readers make meaning from such texts.

2. The cliché of new media scholarship

The current trend in online scholarly publications is to name many of these texts new media scholarship. I believe this is an inaccurate use of the term as it defines new media too broadly to be useful in helping readers approach and interpret the various modes used in scholarship published on the World Wide Web. To make the term new media scholarship more precise and useful, I offer a focused definition of *new media* as texts that juxtapose semiotic modes in new and aesthetically pleasing ways and, in doing so, break away from print traditions so that written text is not the primary rhetorical means. For instance, some of the semiotic modes in a new media text might include sound, graphics, video, animation, and/or written words. These texts are typically distributed in an online context, and because of their use of modes that readers more typically find in aesthetic texts (i.e., film, audio, animation), their argumentative models are not linear, alphabetic, or reminiscent of traditional print-bound models. In this section, I will discuss why using the term new media scholarship to refer to any digitized, online scholarship defines new media too broadly; instead, the terms *online scholarship* or scholarship about new media should be employed when discussing online texts where the written word is most prominent.

Recently,¹ I performed a search for “new media scholarship” on Google, and most of the nearly 200 hits referred to the Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETD) initiative or the Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD). As far back as 1987, the NDLTD—through the efforts of schools including Virginia Tech, University of Florida, and the University of Michigan—has been encouraging graduate schools across the country and internationally to have students submit their theses and dissertations electronically in portable document format (PDF). This initiative offers unprecedented access to new scholarship in all fields of graduate study. The language of the initiative refers to these digital theses and dissertations as “new media scholarship” (UNESCO, 2001). The ETD initiative has greatly expanded since 1987 to include formats such as hypertext, hypermedia, video, VRML (Virtual Reality Modeling Language), and others.² But the primary method of creating an ETD is by using Adobe ACROBAT so that students type their dissertations in a word-processing program, then save them as PDFs in Acrobat. A PDF version of their print document keeps the print-based formatting intact for online presentation. Essentially, most ETDs resemble a print dissertation—they can be downloaded and printed just like a document from Microsoft WORD. Scholars such as Lev Manovich (2001) would have found no trouble in defining new media scholarship as a print-based text remediated for online distribution, such as an ETD. But I believe that using the term to cover a huge range of online scholarly texts, each with their own set of conventions, will make it difficult for readers and scholars to develop and define specific reading strategies for texts that differ from print-based meaning-making strategies. PDFs and most websites are not experimental scholarship; nearly all follow a long history of print conventions. For this reason, I suggest using the term online scholarship to refer to texts such as ETDs and many kinds of websites where the written text is the main mode of the author’s argumentation strategies.

Another inappropriate use of the term new media scholarship arises when it is applied to online scholarship that specifically discusses new media elements or techniques. Over the past several years, the field of computers and composition has seen a sharp rise in the number of published texts that reference areas of study that have led up to new media including visual rhetoric, digital literacies, design, multimedia, and new media—articles and webtexts whose authors argued for the inclusion of reading and creating multimodal texts (texts that incorporate more than a singular mode of communication, more than just the written word) in composition classrooms. There have been multiple special issues on these topics in journals: visual literacy in *Enculturation* 3.2 (Blakesley & Brooke, 2002), digital literacy in *Computers and Composition* 18.1 and 18.2 (Handa, 2001), and new media in the Spring 2003 issue of *Kairos* (for which I must disclose that I was the co-coverweb editor). It seems obvious, based on the increasing abundance of scholarship, that teachers are interested in how to interpret and teach texts that extend beyond the written word. But the look of online scholarship about visual rhetorics, digital literacies, and multimedia that has been published to date appears familiar. With the exception of the *Kairos* special issue, all the articles and webtexts look as if they could just as easily have been published in a print journal as in an online journal. Even Krause (2002), in the online, collaborative issue mentioned earlier, said, “Increasingly, the only significant difference between online journals and their more traditional counterparts is the medium.” The problem is that online journals have the ability to cost-effectively publish texts that can technologically push beyond our reading habits associated with the limits of the printed page.

But they don't. It is the same, linear story with all the major online journals in computers and composition.³ Composition and new media scholars write about how readers can make meaning from images, typefaces, videos, animations, and sounds⁴. . . but most scholars don't compose with these media. It is evident from the scholarship available that compositionists are interested in new media. Yet, they do not seem to value creating new media texts for scholarly publications to explore the multimodal capabilities of new technologies. The linear tradition of composition scholars' publications about new media techniques causes me to suggest that this type of scholarship should not be called new media scholarship but should, more accurately, be labeled scholarship about new media. To show how composition scholars overlook the distinction between scholarship about new media and new media scholarship, I want to explore Patricia Webb Peterson's (2002) analysis of a text published in *Kairos*, which has (traditionally?) been the online journal where authors can publish experimental texts.

Peterson (2002) closely analyzed two peer-reviewed composition journals—*Kairos*, published online, and this print-based journal, *Computers and Composition*. In her close reading of these two journals, she remarked that *Kairos* “identifies its purpose as both conforming to while still challenging traditional disciplinary definitions of scholarship and scholars.” *Kairos* has, however, also “adopted print-based, traditionally accepted strategies for structuring” certain elements of the journal such as the table of contents. Peterson suggested that this switch from challenging to conventional modes is based on how “we are used to reading.” *Kairos* began and continues to offer itself as a place where authors can publish experimental and non-traditional scholarly texts. It is one of the few places online where compositionists can find texts that do not always mimic print conventions by sticking to the written word as the main argumentative mode. *Kairos* attempts to achieve “a balance between tradition and innovation. . . a fact that suggests that the physical (or virtual) medium directly influences the kinds of scholarship that is allowed/encouraged,” as Peterson's reading showed. But does *Kairos* follow through on the innovative potentials of publishing online scholarship? (I ask this, too, as a devoted reader-turned-editor of this journal. . .) If a reader finds link-node hypertexts still innovative in 2003, then, yes, *Kairos* does push scholarly boundaries. However, if readers see how quickly new media technologies are changing this field and want scholarship reflective and truly experimental, then *Kairos* has barely made an impact. This is not to say that authors have not yet approached using new media technologies in online journals—just that there is still much to accomplish, as the example below indicates.

In a Fall 2002 *Kairos* webtext, “[Continuing to] Mind the Gap: Teaching Image and Text in New Media Spaces,” the authors stated on the first screen that their intention with this text was to “claim academic legitimacy” in multimedia by creating “such a text” (Gossett et al.). The work of new media scholars crosses so many disciplinary and departmental boundaries, which makes it necessary for scholars to show colleagues across fields that one can work in new media (and not just write about it); this step is essential to staking claims in the field of new media. “Mind the Gap” takes advantage of new media techniques, including video clips of the authors in a roundtable discussion and still images that add visual interest to the text. These new media elements allow readers to see and hear the authors as they add to their written arguments, but these visual elements do not perform the work of the written argumentative modes—they act as footnotes to the text, supplemental areas to explore, not necessary paths to follow to fully interpret the argument. It is the written text that readers are asked to rely on.

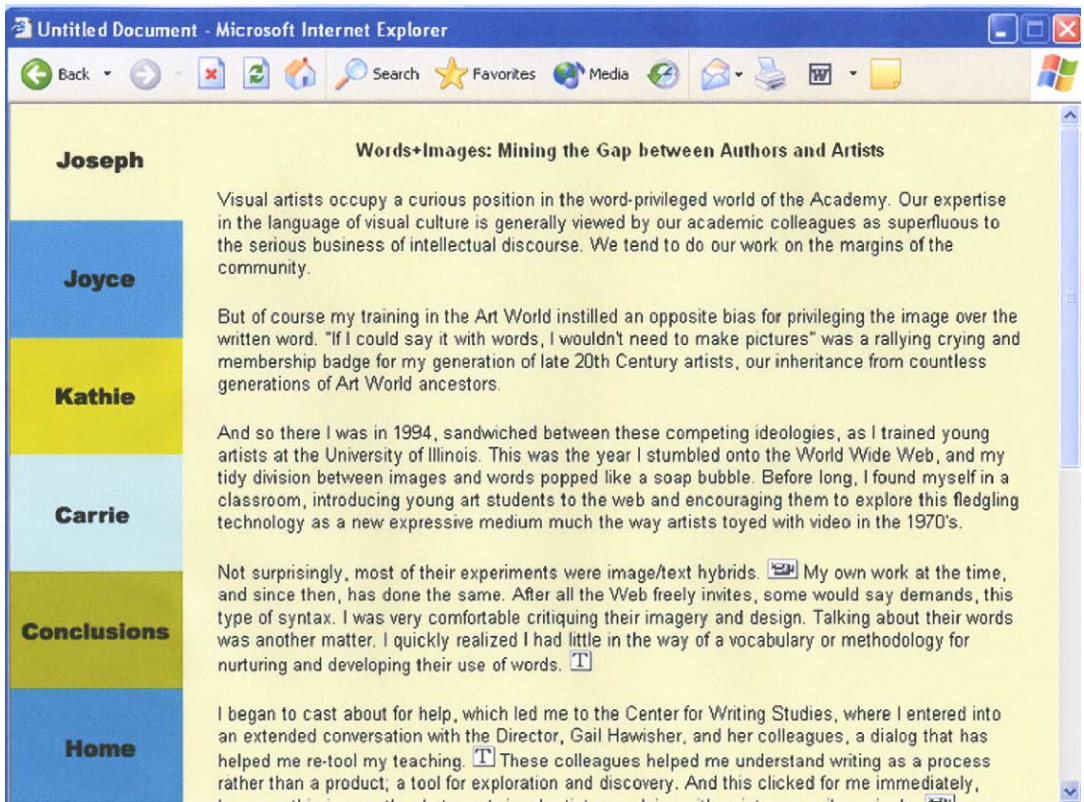


Fig. 1. An example of *scholarship about new media*—an online text that argues for the production and use of new media texts while it maintains print conventions.

The written text is central to the design of the screen and its prominence requires that readers use the text as the main meaning-making mode in understanding the authors' arguments (see Figure 1).

The authors' argument focused on the need to incorporate multimodal literacies with verbal and textual literacies—a notion not new in this field, as evidenced through *The New London Group's Multiliteracies* (2000) and Günther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen's *Multimodal Discourse* (2001) as well as in listserv discussions [see TechRhet's Fall 2002 thread on (web) design]. But, in "Minding the Gap," there is no question that the written text is the main mode of meaning and that the authors' arguments can be found by reading the written text. And there's no question, based on where the text was published (*Kairos*), that the authors intended it to be scholarly. "Minding the Gap" is an example of scholarship about new media and not new media scholarship, as the authors intended.⁵ Continuing to write about the potential of multiliteracies rather than acting through those literacies will limit our notion of scholarship for the future. When authors write about new media, they describe the potentials and possibilities of understanding and using multimodal theories. This scholarship is important in order to have a common (or at least contentious) ground on which to stand, teach, and go forward in the field of new media. But the current scholarship about new media makes it evident that what we

preach is not what we practice. Our scholarly conventions remain in the realm of old media. Let me turn, then, to new media scholarship as I discuss meaning-making strategies useful to such texts.

3. Making meaning in new media scholarship

There are few texts to look to as examples of true new media scholarship and many good reasons as to why journals are not publishing new media texts. It is the authors who must create these texts in order for journals to publish them, and without current examples, authors may feel that new media scholarship is not viable. Peterson (2002) said:

As authors themselves, scholars interpret the journal's purpose and publication requirements through their own ideological, cultural, and political lenses. By pushing the boundaries (in content and form, or what I'll call here, rhetorical presentation), scholars play an integral role in creating a journal's purpose.

The culture of many departments may make it seem like experimental scholarship is not valued. Traditional, written publications are the modes that have been most accepted. Recently, online scholarship has become more accepted, but certainly not to the extent that it is common to find tenure review committees who value an electronic publication equally to a print one. And, then, how many scholars in humanities computing feel as if they can compose new media texts adequate enough to branch out to this experimental, scholarly level and still have enough energy to defend this decision to the review committee? It is not easy, or certain. It is easy (at least, easier) to produce the same kinds of texts—such as this article—we've been taught and are teaching students to produce and value. For authors to find themselves in a routine of producing traditional scholarly texts allows them to concentrate on the argument and not on the overdetermined space and structure of the academic paper. However, in new media texts, the space and structure the arguments are made in can be more immediate and immersive, foregrounded in relation to the structural transparency of the book or link-node hypertext (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 225). Anthony Giddens (1994) suggested that it was possible to break out of this social "routinisation," to "re-groove" what is expected (p. 128). As of yet, new media scholarship is an underdetermined genre, waiting for authors and readers to "determine the design" of these texts (Feenberg, 1999, p. 79). Applying Giddens' and Andrew Feenberg's theories to new media scholarship, it is possible to say that authors who wish to take agency with their scholarship to produce new media arguments can lead the way for others.

But, how do readers of new media scholarship—scholarship that relies on modes of communication other than (or in addition to) alphabetic text—approach and interpret that work as being scholarly? According to the CCC position statement on the standards of scholarly publications, authors of experimental works should be aware that "traditionally valued projects. . . move back and forth between theoretical discussion and practical application" ("Scholarship in Composition," n.d.). New media texts, which are experimental if only because audiences are not used to recognizing their meaning-making strategies, typically move freely between theory and practice through their interactive and animated designs.

(In the final section of this article, I will discuss a new media text that explicitly performs its meaning through the audience's understanding of its multimodal elements and interface design.)

Traditionally, it is the argument—the focused meaning of the text—that a reader looks for to determine its scholarly worth. New media texts may not have linear, print-based argumentation models, so how do readers discover the author's main point? The scholarly discussion of the semiotic potential of visual and aural modes with—and extending beyond—written modes has increased over the last few years. Strategies for reading non-traditional, electronic texts have been described for at least a decade (see, e.g. Douglas, 2000; Johnson-Eilola, 1997; Landow, 1994; Lanham, 1993; Murray, 1997; Sloane, 2000). Hypertext theorists have long been describing how structural models of hypertext essays are modeled on traditional interpretational and rhetorical strategies (earlier, e.g. Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1997; recently, e.g. Carter, 2003). I will forego an in-depth argument into the connections between traditional and hypertextual reading strategies as literary hypertext critics and authors have provided much scholarship about this subject over the last decade. Instead, I refer briefly to authors whose arguments turned toward multimodal and new media texts. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) suggested that using new media techniques would extend texts beyond the print-remediated-as-Web standard where the written word has remained the main mode of communication (although they didn't specify how this might be done). *The New London Group* (2000) described the necessity of including multiliteracy theories and practice in everyday pedagogies. Building on the multiliteracies tradition, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) described how meaning is assigned to all of the “modes deployed in a multimodal object/phenomenon/text” (p. 28) such that a unified interpretation of the various elements in a designed text makes a cohesive argument. They demonstrated this by providing sample analyses of multimodal texts, but those texts remained strictly in comfortable territory, relying on written text and static image combinations. Static text-and-image combinations are increasingly used as examples for analysis in multiliteracy theories (see, e.g. Kress, 2003; Newman, 2002; Unsworth, 2001), and Diana George (2002) offered reading strategies for visual arguments created by students in composition classes. But, these two, while helpful for teachers new to understanding, let alone assigning, such texts also remain in the realm of print, static media. However, Anne Wysocki, in two articles “Impossibly Distinct” (Wysocki, 2001) and “Seriously Visible” (Wysocki, 2003), moved beyond the text-and-image combo by analyzing the interactive and aesthetic features of several multimedia CD-ROMs, showing how each CD creates meaning through its multimodal design.

The point is this: When readers begin to understand and value the multiple semiotic modes of new media texts, the shape of “what counts as forms of knowledge in ‘disciplines’ or ‘subjects’” will also begin to change (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 43). Peterson (2002) offered a similar explanation of how readers have sway over the value of new media scholarship and whether it will appear in an online journal: “What is at stake here is not simply print versus online work, but, rather, who gets to define what it means to be a scholar in the university.” Being able to read and understand new media texts as scholarly is integral to the continuation of knowledge making in the field of composition. However, misinterpretation of the variable modes in a new media text can happen. For readers unfamiliar with understanding how a video, sound, or photograph can function as a way of creating meaning in a scholarly text, new

media scholarship may be dismissed as having an unnecessarily fussy “advertising aesthetic” (Glazier, 2001) making it unworthy as a scholarly text in the eyes of the reader.

3.1. Misreading new media scholarship

With all the modes available for interpretation in a text, including images, animation, sound, and video—modes more often associated with art than composition studies—how can readers understand the potential of using artistic strategies in new media scholarship? As with Kathie Gossett, Carrie A. Lamanana, Joseph Squier and Joyce R. Walker’s (2002) text described previously, readers understood it to be an academic text because it was published in an academic journal. But, some new media texts blur the lines between scholarship and art so much that readers new to multimodal genres cannot distinguish the argument for the art. For readers expecting a traditional, linear argument, the confusion between generic uses of aesthetic and scholarly modes can cause them to dismiss the text altogether. This situation is not uncommon, and is seen in a range of new media texts. For instance, Megan Sapnar (2002), co-editor of the new media site Poemsthatgo (<<http://www.poemsthatgo.com/>>), which features FLASH-based poetic texts, said:

We have received many comments from ‘traditional’ readers of poetry and fiction who express reservations about the New Media format and who see images as ‘visual tricks’ that may give poorly thought out writing an appealing wrapper. One visitor commented, ‘Our attention may become distracted by the visuals thus making us less critical and more acceptant of anything, regardless of quality.’ But it’s my hope that this will give us an opportunity to raise the level of critical discourse regarding textual, aural, and visual literacy. (pp. 90–91)

Although Sapnar spoke specifically about poetic texts, the notion that readers are less critical of a text when images are present is a typical academic argument against the need to critique, or even consider worthy, any new media text that employs non-alphabetic modes. Readers who are unfamiliar with the meaning potentials of such modes usually proffer this argument. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) suggested, however, that readers who are familiar with some semiotic modes can adapt to understanding new modes so that “what is or is not a formally, officially acknowledged mode in a given domain of practice can change over time” (p. 54). The levels of expertise in reading new media texts varies greatly between composition scholars—even those who specialize in visual rhetorics, technology studies, and the combinations of web, print, and/or design experience. In the field of composition, readers simply haven’t seen enough examples of new media scholarship to understand their value.

Until the Spring 2003 special issue on new media in *Kairos*, there had been only one text published in any of the major online journals that could be labeled new media scholarship—Wysocki’s “A Bookling Monument,” which appeared in *Kairos* Fall 2002 issue. [It was published after our initial call for new media submissions—at a time when my co-editor and I believed there were no examples of new media scholarship published in composition and English studies.] One new media text submitted for this *Kairos* call—the text which I will discuss below—made us debate whether new media scholarly texts, those that announced themselves as such, were scholarly in their arguments. This particular text, called *Violence of Text*, was a self-proclaimed “online academic publishing exercise” containing six

scholarly texts designed for new media distribution. It used a combination of sound, video, and written text (in various forms including visible coding) to make its argument. The editor of the collection, [Adrian Miles \(2002c\)](#), announced in his introduction that the texts were not art, despite aesthetic uses of sound and video in ways that broke away from standard presentations of online scholarly texts.

In deciding whether this text was appropriate for publication, the three of us (two co-editors and an assistant editor) wrangled over its “artful” qualities, debating whether a text that had been designed to be aesthetically pleasing and incorporated that aesthetic sense into its meaning had any place in a scholarly journal. Each of us understood the semiotic modes of sound, video, and alphabetic text differently, which meant that each of us made meaning from those modes to a lesser or greater extent than what may have been intended by the designer. These varying interpretation strategies seemed to be based on our prior reading habits of online texts. In turn, this meant that the value those elements held for less-experienced readers of such texts was only as artistic additions to a slim, written text. To editors of a peer-reviewed journal who understood the importance of linear, written arguments, the aesthetic components of this piece translated into non-scholarly elements and were, therefore, outside the realm of needing interpretation. This non-recognition of the text’s multimodal elements is not singular among the readers I discuss here. Composition scholars and students are used to reading electronic texts based in print conventions and rhetorically interpreting still images. But scholars and students differ in new media reading expertise depending on (a) their individual understandings of non-written modes and (b) their backgrounds in other areas of technology and, more so, the arts. One reader and designer of new media texts, [Katherine Parrish \(2002\)](#), described her reading strategies of such texts as making “visible the strategies we already use, or ones that we could or should use when reading any text” (p. 93). As with viewing avant-garde art for the first time and not knowing how to contextualize it, when I read *Violence of Text*, I placed it within a historical framework and used those intertextual knowledges to relate this text to works of different modes and genres I was already familiar with (see [Carroll, 1999](#); [Kress, 1999](#), p. 30). It is the combination of understanding the use of aesthetic elements within intellectual meaning-making strategies that will best help readers interpret scholarly new media texts.

3.2. *Necessary aesthetics*

Akin to Duchamps’ readymades, which critics say are “art” because the pieces appear in museums and not on the street, new media scholarship signals itself as scholarship through its publication context in scholarly online journals. When readers approach a print or hypertext article, they know they are supposed to be reading efferently—for the argument, the “so what” factor. Compositionists are looking for practical and theoretical applications of the author’s argument. Yet, with new media texts, the argument isn’t necessarily foregrounded as it would be in a print, linear, and/or hypertextual article or webtext. The reader must discover the meaning with the help of the text’s multimodal elements. Readers new to new media may overlook the additional layer of meaning created by the combination of these elements in a text’s design, causing readers to believe new media texts are too artistic to be serious scholarship. Compositionists are well acquainted with the argumentation strategies of print-based scholarly texts and scholarship about new media. But the added layer of multimodal and non-linear

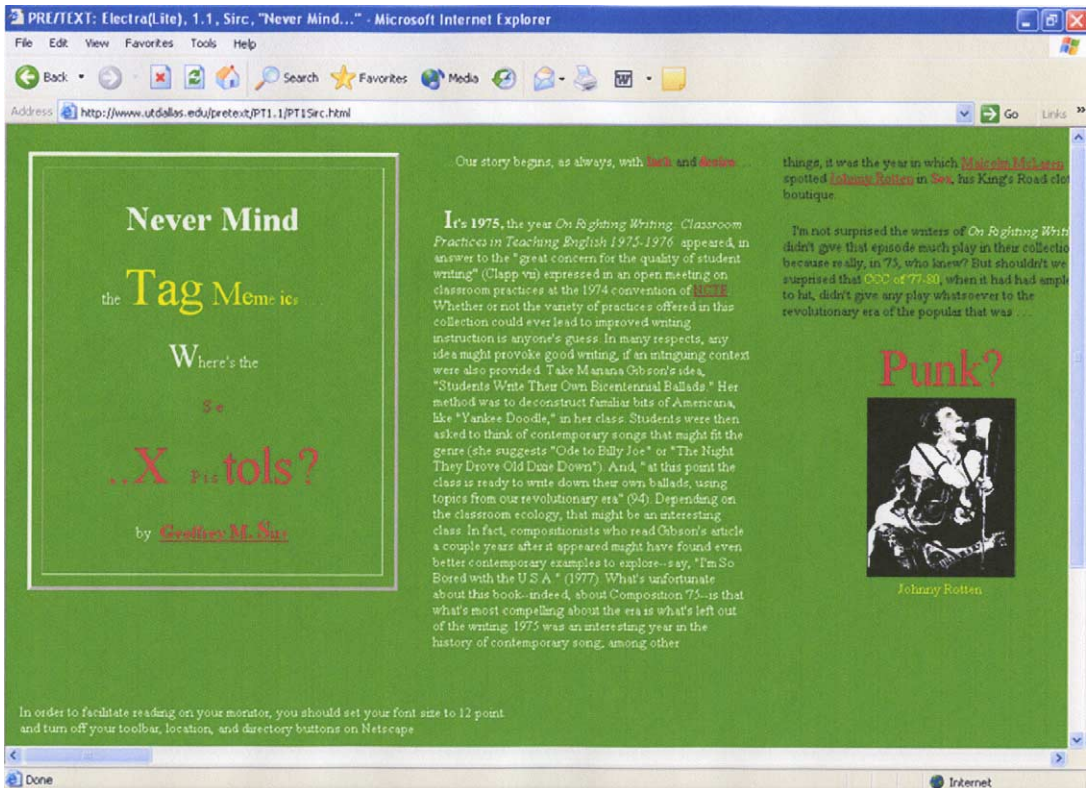


Fig. 2. The initial screen audiences see of Geoffrey Sirc's "Nevermind the tagmemeics," which appeared online in *Pre/Text Electra(lite)* in 1997.

argumentation strategies requires readers to approach these texts with an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities that new media elements can offer toward creating the author's overall meaning. Understanding how video, audio, and other elements can work with or enact an argument can help readers value new media scholarship as worthy of scholarly pursuit. These texts are not traditionally linear nor alphabetic, which may make readers feel they are more experimental than print-based texts.

Composition scholars have designed experimental, online texts for almost a decade (a long time in relation to the technological and theoretical changes this field has seen in that time). Included in this mode of experimental work is Geoffrey Sirc's "Nevermind the Tagmemeics [sic], Where's the Sex Pistols?" (1997), which appeared in the first issue of *Pre/Text: Electra(lite)*. This text is memorable for shocking us out of our print-based complacency with its green background, increasing colorization of words for emphasis, and horizontal scrolling text (see Figure 2). It shows a conscious effort to use the technology at hand to make readers aware of and think about the meanings of design through layout, images, colors, and font choices. The bulk of the page (I call it this because it is one web page in total) is written text. It's reminiscent of print and because the article was republished in *Pre/Text* from the original print version in *College Composition and Communication*, readers would not be surprised

to find its text-heavy presentation, especially given typical web-design conventions in 1997. However, its purposeful horizontal scrolling and use of color for words that aren't links is counter to webtext traditions. Sirc's purpose in this piece is to remind readers that the value of counter-culture (in this case, the Sex Pistols) can play an extremely useful role in composition classrooms and that students might react more congenially to first-year composition courses if instructors asked them to read and write non-traditional texts.

I agree with Sirc's argument; yet, the design of the site, while mimicking the punk-rock culture of being in-your-face, makes me cringe. Seeing the text is difficult because of the multiple colors, which makes reading and understanding the online version of the text next to impossible for readers who don't want design to get in the way of the scholarship. I don't blame those readers, design should never get in the way, unless that's the intention. With each choice a designer makes, the meaning of the text is affected. The choice of green background and white text makes Sirc's argument stand out in my mind, even if it is still difficult to read. Many readers would not want to approach such a text, and that is a choice that Sirc made through his design. How design contributes (or takes away from) an argument is an issue that authors must confront if they want to continue composing for online distribution.

Since 1997, Sirc has continued to crusade for the use of non-traditional and pop-culture texts in the composition class. In *Writing New Media*, Sirc (2004) called for "aestheticizing the scene of composition in an idiosyncratic, obsessional way" through technology use and new media (p. 116). Experimenting with texts in this way—in the classroom and in our scholarship—will help bring what Fluxus founder George Maciunas called "an art consciousness to daily life" (cited in Sirc, p. 117). It is through an art consciousness and the valuation of aesthetic elements in our scholarship that the notion of what is acceptable as scholarship will begin to shift. When new media scholarship becomes more prevalent, readers will begin to see in journals such as *Kairos*, as Peterson (2002) said, a shift in "what academic scholarly work on the web will look like." *Kairos* wants to "challenge traditional disciplinary definitions of good scholarship in that already created field by creating a space for unconventional projects—both in terms of topic and presentation" (Peterson, 2002). The *Kairos* new media issue, in particular, was intended to broaden what would be accepted as composition scholarship. Expanding our notion of acceptable scholarship and allowing non-traditional, non-print-based, and aesthetic compositions into our classroom practices will benefit, on a daily basis, our changing communication strategies.

Compositionists, myself included, have much to learn about the role aesthetics can play in composing meanings. We can turn to practitioners of aesthetic new media texts for help. Even though readers have become accustomed to clicking links and reading lexias to determine a text's argument, over the past few years arguments against a traditional link-node structure have begun to emerge in new media studies, specifically in electronic writing circles (Glazier, 2002; Sanford, 2001). Christy Sheffield Sanford (2001), a web-based poet, said in regards to the changing styles and materiality of writing for the web that "the dependence on endless linking has weakened in favor of show hide scripts and scripts that allow a number of documents to open simultaneously or in tandem. . . . The ability to work with space time has grown more sophisticated." Innovations in new media texts typically come from the art and creative writing fields first, and then move into realms such as composition studies. Writers such as Sanford and Loss Glazier have composed new media poetic texts—texts that incorporate FLASH animation

and that display the materiality of coding and scripting to make meaning—for several years. Composition studies and authors who compose for online publication will need to embrace these changing composition patterns just as teachers have with the inclusion of visuals and web design into their classrooms. To do this, teachers need examples to follow. Thus, in the next section, I provide a reading of one of the few existing examples of a successful scholarly new media text that does move away from link-node structures. I analyze “Digital Multiliteracies,” a section from *Violence of Text*, to demonstrate how aesthetic modal elements offer meaning in a new media text.

4. Reading a new media text

Readers of new media texts can construct meaning from, among other ways, a text’s multimodal elements and navigational design. This method of interpreting the meaning of a new media text is similar to George P. Landow’s (1997) notion that readers of hypertext can interpret meaning from individual nodes to form a larger argument (see also Hawk, 2002). In the new media text, “Digital Multiliteracies,” Adrian Miles (2002b) argued that teachers should have students compose multimodal texts such as video blogs, or vogs (short, video-based texts), as a way of teaching students to be digitally multiliterate. His text is designed to enact his argument because the reader must choose multimodal clips (still images, audio, and written text)⁶ to play back simultaneously on a timeline, creating a vog based on the reader’s selections. I strongly encourage readers of this article to visit and interact with “Digital Multiliteracies,” which was published in *Kairos*’ new media issue (see <<http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/8.1>>).

Miles’ text was designed in collaboration with one of his students, James Taylor, who designed the new media text to resemble the interface of a video-editing program. Miles (2002c) introduced this text to readers with the following road map (keeping in mind that Miles is also the editor of the *Violence of Text* collection, hence his use of the third person):

With Adrian Miles’ “Digital Multiliteracies” the readerly versus writerly text has been turned on its head into the composed versus performed text. Here image, text, and audio need to be dragged from their place holders in the clip selector onto their corresponding timeline. Once assembled the play button in the viewer window can be clicked and this will play what the reader has assembled as a ‘roll your own’ edit of the paper and presentation. This dramatically appropriates Miles’ commentary on the significance of digital multiliteracy and interactive video as a writing practice where the ‘what next’ remains radically open. As Miles’ text only ever happens through the intervention of a reader who appropriates its parts in building, it foregrounds the dissolved authority of reader and author. (p. 4)

With this introduction, readers can situate Miles’ argument within the context of reading-reception theory (i.e., “readerly versus writerly,” “dissolved authority of reader and author”) and hypertext and postmodern theory (i.e., “composed versus performed text”). It also stated Miles’ argument: Composing video is similar to “writing practice” in becoming digitally multiliterate. He also referred to the notion of “what next” as a traditional organizational structure of print and web-based texts, which he wanted to broaden akin to transactional theorists’ ideas of the open text (see Eco, 1984; Rosenblatt, 1994) and early hypertext theorists’ arguments for

non-linearity and reader-composed texts (see Landow, 1994, 1997; Murray, 1997). Although Miles' text does not necessarily do away with reader and writer in the grand sense of "the author is dead"—because it offers a specific and limited set of text, audio, and image choices for readers to manipulate—it does provide readers with individual opportunities to (re)construct Miles' argument through the use of multimodal clips and navigational strategies associated with video-editing software. In the next sections, I briefly analyze five of the major design features of "Digital Multiliteracies" to demonstrate how Miles and Taylor used aesthetically based, multimodal elements to create scholarly meaning in their text.

4.1. The interface

Readers, upon opening "Digital Multiliteracies," see a clip selector, a viewer, and three time-lines (see Figure 3). There are three areas in the clip selector—stills, audio, and text—from which readers can choose individual, timed clips. By choosing which clips to drag to the timeline, readers "interpret through implementation," as Miles (2002c) stated in his introduction to the text. Clips can be chosen at random, or readers can click once on each of the clips in the selector to see or hear that individual clip in the viewer.

Because there are three types of clips, a reader can drag any number of each kind into the timeline and play them back to form what Adrian Miles (2002a) called a "mollage"—the combination of montage and collage (p. 10)—from which readers can make meaning. Many

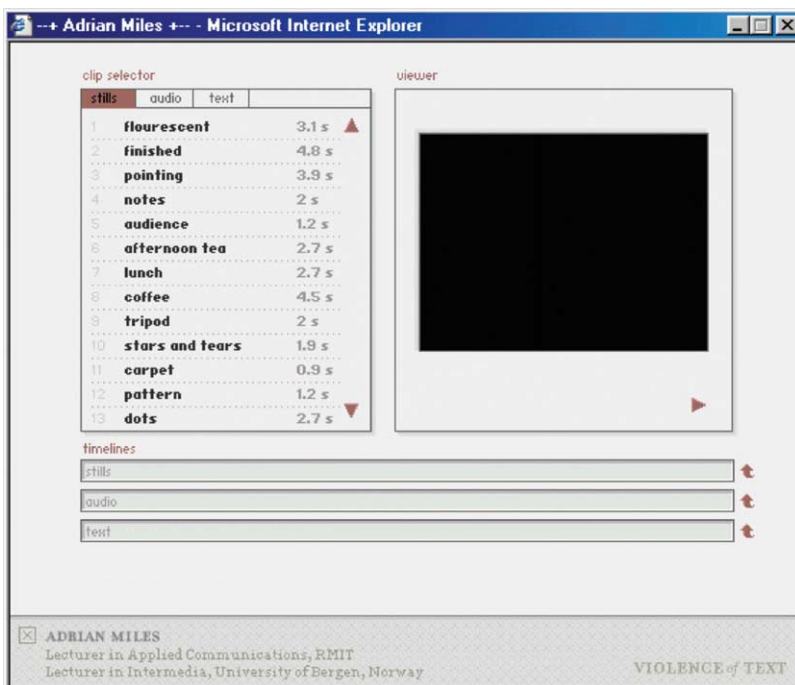


Fig. 3. The interface of *Violence of Text* mimics interfaces of video-editing software programs like IMOVIE.

hypertext theorists have noted the connection between hypertext writing and collage. Bolter and Grusin (1999) furthered that connection between collage and the reading and composing strategies that authors and readers use with new media texts when they said, “In collage and photomontage as in hypermedia, to create is to rearrange existing forms” (p. 39). By rearranging the clips in Miles’ text, the reader gets to create the text, performing its argument in a true non-linear fashion. Without the reader choosing clips to include on the timelines, this new media text would not be able to perform its intended argument. Although, the same could be said of more traditional hypertexts (scholarly and literary)—that the reader must click to make the text move forward (or backward or in any direction the author has prescribed)—with Miles’ text, a click will not suffice to move the reader much farther into the text. The reader must participate by dragging the still, audio, or text clips that she wants to the timelines. For the fullest understanding of the text’s meaning, all three timelines must be used, and then the reader must click the play button on the viewer to see the composed m collage. No matter which selection and arrangement of clips the reader makes, the argument she constructs will be a smaller version of the whole, perhaps made to lesser or greater strengths depending on the combination of clips chosen. I will now briefly examine the clip selectors to show how new media elements, such as individual multimodal clips, can help readers construct arguments in new media scholarship.

4.2. *Text clips*

I want to start with the third clip selector, the text clips, because it will be the mode that compositionists are most familiar with. I believe the designer set the text clips as the last option in this multimodal presentation to encourage readers to try the other two (and perhaps unfamiliar) modes first. The text clips in “Digital Multiliteracies” are quotes taken from Miles’ paper⁷ version of his presentation. Readers are offered text-bites of Miles’ linear argument, which can be used in conjunction with the audio and still clips in the new media version to give readers an overall view and sense of interpreting his argument. The text clips step linearly through the paper version of Miles’ argument, and readers who are in need of a sense of his organization of digital multiliteracies will be able to find it by reading through all of the text clips in order. But this is not necessary. Reading just a few clips, even out of order, would give readers a similar clue into Miles’ meaning. Keep in mind, however, that the designer did not include all of Miles’ linear text. On average, there is about a sentence or less quoted from each paragraph of the ten-page paper. Some paragraphs are skipped altogether. If readers simply browsed through the text clips, they would find written text to support Miles’ argument for digital multiliteracies. For example, the second clip, “reading & writing,” says, “However, it is apparent that to be literate includes reading and writing, that reading by itself renders us consumers of literacy but that consumption, of itself, is only half of what constitutes a proper literacy.” This clip constructs the argument that literacy is more than interpretive skills; it must include production of texts. Another clip, “hard copy,” says, “there are some aspects of hard copy [print-based texts] that we have maintained in relation to ‘soft’ forms such as the World Wide Web.” In this quote, Miles argued that the Web is too much in this (print) world and does not take enough advantage of technological capabilities and reading strategies that move away from print standards.

The text clips tend to spell out Miles' argument more specifically and succinctly than the audio and still clips do. But, Miles and Taylor reminded us through the text's design that, in Western reading habits of left-to-right and the Web's typical organizational and hierarchical navigation patterns, the text clips are the least important of the three modes because they are placed third in a line of choices for the reader. The text clips would normally be the last ones readers would encounter, after they have read and made meaning from the still clips and audio clips. Because of the placement of the text clips in the navigational hierarchy, the designer signals to readers that written text is not the most important, nor the only method of making meaning in a new media text. By taking readers' focus away from written text, the designer intended for readers to make meaning through the other multimodal elements, which helps to enact Miles' argument that readers should be digitally multiliterate. From the text clips, I'll move backwards through the navigational choices; next are the audio clips.

4.3. *Audio clips*

The audio tracks are listed in the clip selector by key words taken from the clip. These clips are taken from the question-and-answer session after Miles' presentation, as well as from an interview with him. The still clips present readers with a sonic sense of the symposium, providing an immediacy to the text. This voice-of-immediacy helps readers make meaning from the audio clips because, as Bolter and Grusin (2000) suggested, while cyberspace can be categorized as a nonplace because it is "defined by video and audio as pure perceptual experiences, expressions of the enjoyment of media" (p. 179), the designers combated the nonplace feel of the Internet by using elements that offer immediacy to the physical space in which the original presentation occurred. Readers now have a voice with a face. Even though the presentation is long in the past, being able to hear the speaker's voice, as if he were talking to readers now, recreates immediacy for the audience.

The first clip in the audio selector is called "against something." Although this title is vague, the reader soon discovers that part of the audio says "writing is always against something." The full meaning of the text is quite different than what readers might expect from its short title. The same could be said of another clip, "be literate," which, at first, might seem to be a call-to-action: Be Literate! And while this is somewhat the argument Miles made in this clip, the full audio explores multiple possibilities of what literacy means: "OK, there's an awful lot of variables that we can put in there that we actually have to be literate about." Another clip, called "english teacher," helps readers make sense of Miles' argument for digital multiliteracies because it refers to the outdated (and outmoded?) print-based traditions of reading Shakespeare when students should also know how to compose multimodal texts. Not only is the text of this clip somewhat accusatory, but the tone of the speaker's voice, heard through the audio clip, adds to that indignant feeling—Why should Shakespeare be more important than a shopping list? he seemed to be asking. Miles questioned succinctly in this six-second clip a typical skills-based approach to literacy. Miles repeated his argument later in the list of audio clips, as in the "shopping list" clip, when he said, "It's much more significant to a literate culture that you know how to pick up a biro [pen] and an envelope and write a shopping list on the back than it is to read Shakespeare." (Perhaps Miles' argument tends toward the drastic at this point; it might be better to suggest that, in addition to Shakespeare, students should be well-versed in digital

multiliteracies.) By clicking through audio clips, even randomly, a reader can make meaning from these sound-bytes in relation to Miles' overall argument. The multiple modes that the designer presents to readers encourages them to perform, or rather, produce Miles' argument for themselves. In this way, the audio clips can be approached with as much meaning-making potential as the text clips provide, if not more because of their immediacy represented through hearing Miles' voice and the tone with which he delivers these audio-based arguments.

4.4. *Still clips*

The still clips present a new challenge to readers unfamiliar with reading aesthetic elements in a scholarly text. These clips appear to be photos taken during the symposium; they range in subject matter from images of coffee cups and the carpet to out-of-focus pictures of Miles yawning. The stills don't necessarily stand out as the best examples of the text's argument on first look. The first clip readers might see when opening Miles' text is an upward, angled shot of fluorescent lighting, entitled "fluorescent" [sic]. The designer may have taken advantage of many readers' lack of new media knowledge, forcing them away from a strict, print-based reading by presenting photographs seemingly unrelated to Miles' intended argument. Readers may ask why a designer would include photos of the presentation, monitors, audience members, coffee cups, and the carpet—half of them out of focus and hard to see clearly. However, a reader can get a feeling for the conference location by clicking through these images. When I read through these stills, I get a strong sense of the location, place, size, and atmosphere of the conference—not something very easily or even typically conveyed through the Internet in HTML-based (HyperText Markup Language) sites. The time-space of the conference is presented to readers through the use of physically locating, albeit quirky, photographs. This physicality has meaning and can be related to what Bolter and Grusin (2000) called immediacy in new media texts:

A photograph may be either an expression of the desire for immediacy or a representation of that desire. The photograph that represents itself to be viewed without irony expresses the desire for immediacy, while a photograph that calls attention to itself as a photograph becomes a representation of that desire. (p. 110)

In this way, the designer's choice for using a mixture of photo types—where some are realistic (like the blurry shots of Miles, see [Figure 4](#)) that give us immediacy into the symposium space, and some that call attention to themselves as artful representations of the symposium space—work to make the reader feel more connected to the space of the text. It is shots like these that help to personalize this text in a way that breaks it out of a traditional notion of web-based scholarly texts, those conventions that Roland Barthes (1975) referred to as "the institutions of text" (p. 60), and shows the reader what it felt like to be there at the symposium. If these images seem to be bizarre inclusions into this scholarly text—after all, it is rare (if ever) that an academic would choose to include the parts of a presentation that were spontaneous or off-the-cuff remarks into the published version of that speech—the designer uses them to remind readers of the rare, lived moments in which "Digital Multiliteracies" was presented, that it was part of a conversation, that the ideas are informational and informal, even fun.

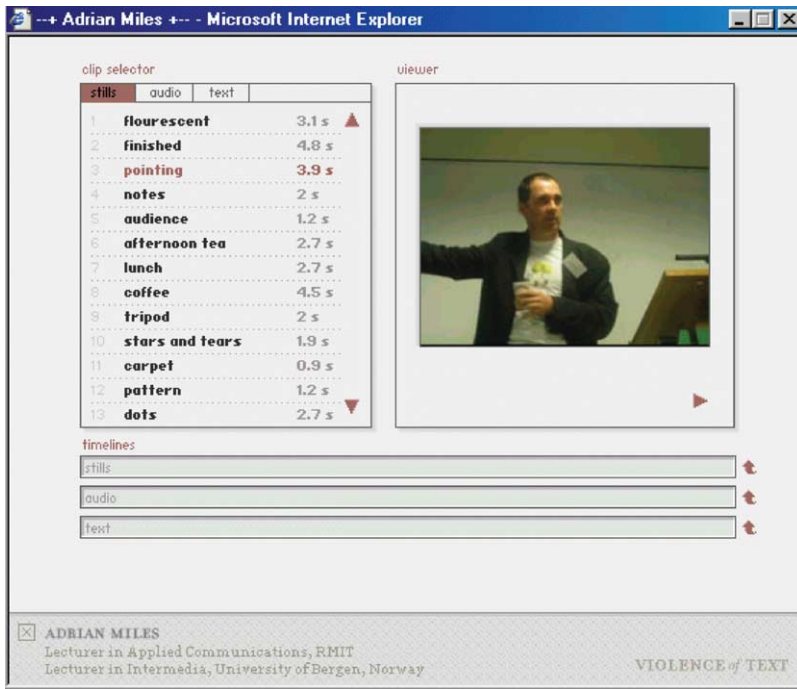


Fig. 4. The blurry photo of Miles can be read as a realistic interpretation in an of-the-moment symposium space.

While Bolter and Grusin (2000) suggested that readers “become hyperconscious of the medium in photomontage, precisely because conventional photography is a medium with such loud historical claims to transparency” (p. 38), the inclusion of a variety of still clips helps readers re-enact Miles’ presentation, and in doing so, recreate his argument for using multimodal elements in meaningful ways. Miles and Taylor asked readers to be hyperconscious of the symposium’s setting and the medium of photography and montage as elements not to be overlooked as a meaning-making strategy. The still clips become one more mode through which readers can understand Miles’ argument while enacting that argument through their own viewing and interpretation of those stills.

4.5. The timelines

Sirc (2004) argued that the main challenge of a designer is to invent a uniquely visionary world from carefully chosen fragments of the existing one. Both the designer of “Digital Multiliteracies” and the reader of that text create a “visionary world” of new media scholarship where meaning is made through the reader’s choice and arrangement of multimodal fragments. By placing the multimodal clips on the timelines, readers create a video montage (or, as Miles would probably say, the potential to be a vog—based on the shortness of the clips). Through this navigational, meaning-making structure, readers move away from traditional presentations of academic arguments towards new media presentations that take advantage of multimodal techniques to further scholarly

argument. The use of these techniques helps readers experience the text as it is being performed.

As I mentioned earlier, Miles' text uses an interface similar to video-editing software. Although the interface of video-editing programs is meant to be transparent even as we are well aware that interfaces are not transparent (see, e.g. *Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Wysocki & Jasken, 2004*), this assimilated interface, put into the context of scholarship, helps readers construct meaning through its use (*Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 22*). Many readers of this text may not be familiar with video-editing interfaces, which is why Miles provided a short explanation of how to read and/or construct the text in his introduction. Without the timeline, this text's meaning could only be partially interpreted. Although a reader can gain much meaning from the individual playing of clips in the clip selector, it is the combination and arrangement of these clips onto their respective timelines, and the playing of that collection that will help readers reach a broader understanding of Miles' argument. To understand his argument, a reader chooses clips from each clip selector by dragging them to their respective timeline. When she is done selecting clips, she views her collection, playing each still, audio, and text clip in the order in which she placed it in the timeline. Each timeline plays simultaneously so that all three modes of clips play at once. Regardless of the clips that a reader selects for the timelines, Miles' argument is performed in two ways: (a) through the reader's enacting of digital multiliteracies by creating a *vog* that uses multimodal elements, and (b) through the meaning of the multimodal elements as they are combined and played in the reader's version of a *vog*.⁸ For a reader new to such texts, understanding that the multimodal, extra-alphabetic elements a designer uses are available for meaning making is the first step to recognizing the importance this direction of scholarship can take us.

5. Conclusion

"Digital Multiliteracies" offer readers a chance to enact and interpret an author's argument through multimodal elements and navigational strategies. The use of still, audio, and text clips in conjunction with their placement on a timeline that plays the clips back in sequence directly relates to Miles' argument that teachers should help their students become digitally multiliterate by understanding how to "read across" software programs and use technology in ways that break from print traditions (*Miles, 2002a, p. 4*). This text demonstrates how multimodal elements and new media strategies such as the enactment of the text through a timeline can help readers interpret meanings made through modes that move beyond linear, print traditions. Similar to reading strategies in hypertext, where readers have to compose an argument based on smaller lexias of meaning, the argument of this text can be gathered through reading and interpreting the smaller sections and multiple modes the designer provided, even if those modes aren't easily recognized as valuable in a scholarly text. While space prevents me from offering specific reading strategies that would help readers new to new media texts interpret the (often experimental) aesthetic and scholarly elements that are usually found in their designs, I hope readers will take away the potential of reading and composing in new media as future avenues for scholarship in and out of the classroom. But in order to value

this kind of scholarship readers need more new media texts on which to base a collective understanding of the ways cross-generic modes function. Valuing these texts—and making them less rare, which will increase our analytical and interpretational strategies for them—is important for new media scholarship to move forward. I don’t expect authors to jump at creating new media scholarship. There are issues to address including time, technology, and tenure. But, as presses and print journals face growing budgetary constraints that prevent them from accepting as many manuscripts as they have in the past, those authors who are poised at the edge of new media scholarship—scholars in computers and composition and new media studies—should take advantage of their technological talents and creative publication outlets, including *Kairos*, and show the rest of the field that new media texts can be as meaningful as print articles and webtexts. Enacting our scholarship through new media will help us to show, not tell.

Notes

1. I performed this search in September 2002, January 2003, and November 2003. Hits remained consistent between 200 and 300.
2. There are a few ETDs that don’t use PDFs as their distributive mode. Some theses and dissertations are created as HTML documents or use multiple modes (such as audio components) to make meaning, but these texts are rare and still mostly rely on the written word to make their arguments.
3. I reviewed all past issues (up to November 1, 2002) of *Kairos*, *Enculturation*, *CCC Online*, *academic writing*, and *The Writing Instructor*, and based their selection as “major” journals on their participation in a Summer 2002 cross-journal collaboration.
4. Well, no, composition scholars are not writing about sound. Not since *Enculturation’s* special issue [3.1] on it. Why not?
5. It is surprising that the authors chose text-heavy argumentation strategies considering that at least two of them have published texts that took advantage of multimodal elements [See Walker (2001) and Squier (1995)]. It should be noted that Squier’s *Urban Diary* heavily influenced my decision to pursue new media as a course of study, which, perhaps, influenced my expectations of how the *Kairos* text was presented. On the other hand, like this print article, it is probable that the authors of “Minding the Gap” wanted readers to see how new media elements could be used to support scholarly arguments while still appealing to readers’ expectations of scholarship-as-linear-argument. In fact, the text is quite persuasive in its argument that new media techniques are essential to the growing need for multiliteracies in curricula. My argument here is only that it isn’t a new media text.
6. Miles teaches at RMIT University, Melbourne, where in Fall 2002, he asked students in his advanced media course to attend a symposium on digital literacy. Their assignment was to remediate the linear papers of six presenters (including Miles’ own text), to conduct interviews of the presenters, and take photographs and audio of the presentations. With these multimodal materials, the students created new media versions of the presenters’ arguments—texts that enacted their arguments through their new media presentation. The

still, audio, and written clips in Miles' text "Digital Multiliteracies" come directly from that symposium.

7. I must, of course, acknowledge that "Digital Multiliteracies" is a remediation of a conference presentation Miles gave in 2002. I do not dwell, however, on the print-based nature of the original presentation because, in fact, it was not wholly print-based. In remediating the text for new media consumption, the designer used Miles' ten-page written conference paper, but also used—in equal if not greater numbers—photos from the symposium and audio clips taken from the presentation, the question-and-answer session that followed, and from interviews. Thus, while the original argument Miles presented in the paper is present within this new media text, the overwhelming amount of meaning-making strategies relies on non-alphabetic elements.
8. Even though Bolter and Grusin (2000) suggested that new media texts may remediate television moreso than film because films tend to not include written text overlapping the visuals, it is apparent from Miles' text that vogs are the medium he wants to discuss (p. 190). Readers can further relate Miles' text to vogs, rather than television, if they look at other examples of vogs that Miles has created (see his vog website at <<http://hypertext.rmit.edu.au/vog/>>).

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