TOWARDS MULTIMEDIA TEXTUALITY: new types of text in a changing world
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by Zachar Laskewicz  
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1. INTRODUCTION  

Gutenberg’s printing press brought about rapid sociocultural change in its age; it had an enormous impact on the way we approached knowledge transferral and ultimately the way we viewed language. Although writing existed in western culture long before Gutenberg, it is only thanks to the mass-production of texts—in Gutenberg’s case the bible—that our ‘literary’ culture began in any real sense. In other words, the possibility to print books helped to bring about a radical epistemic shift which led to cultural change. This paper concerns a similarly radical epistemic shift that we are currently going through thanks to another technological development—new forms of textuality made possible thanks to the development of Interactive Multimedia and the Internet. We also look at the theoretical developments which have led to this change. In addition to the theoretical developments, however, I would also like to discuss some new forms of experiencing text in our culture, some of which preceded the innovation of the technological determinism many of us attribute to the internet and recent CD-ROM technology. I also make parallels and comparisons to other cultures which have experienced and/or been experiencing textuality in a similar way for hundreds of years. In other words multimedial textuality is something that has been present in our culture before the actual technological developments had taken place. Here I am referring to texts as diverse as Choose-Your-Own-Adventure books, role-playing games and Balinese lontar manuscripts.

Our discussion includes some ideas concerning the future of new forms of electronic publishing such as the multimedia interactive CD-ROM and the well known and feared ebook. Speaking from personal experience this fear is tangible and the whole argument a real one. In the future, will the notion of the book as we see it now disappear? How are traditional notions of knowledge transferral questioned? What sort of epistemological impact will this have? The internet, for example, makes collaborative work on texts possible, meaning the text is always a work in progress. This stands against the permanent and secure form of ‘the Author’ presented by the printed book. The article by Barthes discussing ‘The Death of the Author’ (Barthes, 1982a) seems to be the first step towards this type of textual realisation. Barthes describes the notion of the author as being a product of our society emerging from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, as it is more nobly put, the ‘human person’” (Barthes, 1982a: 142-143), although he recognises that ‘to give writing its future’, “it is necessary to overthrow the myth: the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the Death of the Author” (Barthes, 1982a: 148).
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Such developments in the internet, however, are taking these ideas even further. Will this new and dynamic approach to textuality change the way we think and feel in a similar fashion to Gutenberg’s printing press? I hope to demonstrate that the future is something to look forward to, and that both forms of knowledge transferral will be able to co-exist in a union which will enrich both forms.

Firstly I discuss a number of basic concepts regarding the way we approach text and how this relates to the publishing industry in both its new and traditional forms. This includes a theoretical discussion involving the origin of the notion of Text and how our approach to such ‘texts’ has changed thanks to both theoretical (Barthesian) and technological developments. This is followed by a discussion of the notion of ‘Text’ and ‘Textuality’ and how a new understanding of these terms can provide us with a better understanding of how texts work in culture. Our contemporary understanding of the notion of textuality is compared to that of other cultures, functioning to point out some of the restrictions implicit in our traditional approach to books, literature and interaction with our textual forms. The purpose of this is to demonstrate some of the ways we can learn from other types of ‘text’, concentrating particularly on the multimedial textuality of Tamil or Balinese culture. This leads to a discussion of multimedia texts and interculturality. The ultimate intention is to demonstrate the similarities connecting these ‘other’ forms of textuality with the new multimedial text which is having an increasing influence on our lives.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

What, then, is ‘text’? What is the origin of this term? It comes originally from the Latin word ‘textus’ which actually refers to the process of weaving fabric, and so a dynamic metaphor is created for a complex weave of contrasting elements which combine to form a whole. Does this correspond to the traditional western approach to texts? Aren’t books supposed to be permanent and provide us with knowledge we can constantly rely on? Books are trustworthy and safe forms of representation in our culture and there is nothing wrong with that. How did we develop this epistemological condition? Although we can’t possibly attempt to answer that question here, it is most certainly connected to the invention of the printing press. Before this important innovation ‘text’ signified an entire tradition of rewriting ancient works in the safe haven of monasteries. Monks considered this task a creative one where the whole notion of writing and decoration formed part of the same ‘textual’ act. These texts were also ‘interacted with’ in a dynamic fashion: sometimes the texts were elaborated upon and decorated, forming a dynamic part of the lives of the monks. The metaphor of the textus ‘weave’ seems more appropriate in these terms, and it is thanks to mediaeval culture that concepts such as the ‘troping’ of texts were introduced which also helped to develop the history of musical notation. The printing press created a paradigm in which a dynamic ‘textuality’ became reduced to single edition ‘texts’.

The Parisian Tel Quel school was to start the ball rolling towards developing a totally new paradigm, one that has seen its ultimate realisation in what I call ‘multimedial textuality’.
Barthes proposed a dynamic new definition for the word *Text* which opposed the static ‘Work’. The *Work*, according to Barthes, corresponded with the then existing notion of text which he thought of in a ‘Newtonian fashion’, and his new concept of *Text* represented a set of new ideas. He saw the *Work* as a form existing in “bookstores, in card catalogues, and on course lists” whereas the *Text* “reveals itself, articulates itself according to or against certain rules” (Barthes, 1982b: 75). The *Work* is something physical, like a book, which you can hold in your hands, whereas a *Text* “is experienced only in an activity, a production” (ibid.). The *Text*, in other words, is a set of ideas about a given subject or genre which is the dynamic activity of production. In a practical sense, it resembles the changeable nature of ‘texts’ in the Middle-Ages in that on each rewriting, they could be brought up to date. A Barthesian *Text*, however, can be more easily described as a set of ideas or attitudes to existing ‘Works’ which change the way their contents are interpreted. According to Barthes, when we ‘read’ a *Work*, we are actually ‘playing’ a *Text* in the musical and game-like sense of this verb:

“The Text itself *plays*…; and the reader himself plays twice over: playing the Text as one plays a game, he searches for a practice that will re-produce the Text; but, to keep that practice from being reduced to a passive, inner mimesis…, he also *plays* the Text in the musical sense of the term.”

(Barthes, 1982b: 79)

The notion of a Barthesian *Text* is sometimes easier to conceptualise if one compares it to music: a ‘score’ (which is a musical realisation of the *Work*) receives realisation in the form of an ‘interpretation’ (a dynamic realisation of the *Text*). No musician is ever considered to perform a given score in the same way twice, and there are a wide range of different ways to interpret scores depending on factors such as time, environment, theory and fashion. Similarly, when a *Work* is brought into action (for example, when it is read), it is ‘interpreted’ thanks to factors inherent in the *Text*; when considered in this way, no two realisations of ‘Works’ can ever be considered the same. What Barthes was trying to say was that every new realisation of *Text* meant a new plurality. This *Text* can also be compared to a multimedia ‘game’ which involves the interaction of the user, or an ‘internet’ website which is constantly in the process of being created by a number of writers. The paradigm change that was to be brought about by Barthes is one that can help us make sense of ‘virtual’ textuality.

“*Text is that social space that leaves no language safe or untouched, that allows no enunciative subject to hold the position of judge, teacher, analyst, confessor or decoder. The theory of the Text can coincide only with the activity of writing.*”

(Barthes, 1982b: 81)

These notions of *Text* and *Work* are important ideas in understanding the Barthesian notions of ‘readerly’ and ‘authorly’ texts. Authorly texts are those which are aligned towards the ‘Work’, where any meaning is considered to have been put there by the author, whereas ‘readerly’ texts are those which are aligned towards the *Text*, in that any ‘interpretation’ is put
into the hands of the reader. Theoretical development that was to follow Barthes was to extend upon this notion of ‘readerly’ textuality as new forms of ‘multimedial’ communication began to be considered in terms of their semiotic (meaning-bearing) properties. To make the terms less ambiguous but still to provide the *Text* with a dynamic function affecting the way a *Work* is realised, I have applied my own meanings to the terms *Text* and *Textuality*. In my system, a *Text* is any cultural object that can hold knowledge and transfer it. Examples of *Texts*, therefore, could include books, paintings or a flower. *Textuality*, however, refers to the cultural skills that an individual receives to enable him or her to interpret such ‘texts’, or even to recognise them as holding possible knowledge. For an Australian Aboriginal tracker, for example, the whole natural environment becomes filled with textual tools that could transfer knowledge concerning an individual being tracked; to almost anyone else these potential textual vehicles would be meaningless, empty of knowledge. In occidental culture, if you give someone a flower, it can be a powerful textual vehicle. For one, its textual meaning could depend on the environment in which it is given, but the flower certainly contains positive sensual meaning if it is ‘smelled’. However, if an Indian was to receive a flower (in the form of a lotus) from his parents, the signification would be entirely different, he would know that the time had come for his arranged wedding.

Lacan, in the field of psychoanalysis, was to also change the way people viewed interpretation by attempting to understand the ‘drive’ which is so important in changing the way people realise their desires. His discussion of the libido as an ‘unreal but not imaginary’ organ which “is defined by articulating itself” (Lacan, 205) is important in this regard; it is a highly ‘readerly’ approach dependent on what the individual does. This is based on a post-structuralist approach where culture is seen as a vast array of texts and textualities with no stable centre. Foucault, in a similar fashion but in some ways in opposition to Lacan, demonstrated that ‘sexuality’ could also be viewed as a type of textuality. Thanks to Foucault in his important work on the history of sexuality, the Freudian concept of repression and desire presented by Freud was rejected in favour of a textual theory dependent on environmental circumstances; what an individual actually realises sexually is dependent on their textuality in this regard—meaning how their culture has taught them to realise or repress their sexual desires—and not purely on repression of the libido.

Lacan and Foucault had taken important foundational steps as ‘desire’ and ‘power’ began to be viewed in a textual fashion. New types of textualities began to be associated with *Texts* as the definition of *Text* began to expand; people could not just ‘read’ texts, but also look at them, listen to them, feel them, or gaze at them. If a *Work* or a ‘text’ in the traditional sense is defined as a means to hold knowledge, then *reception theory* offered a new set of ways to get at that knowledge and to interact with that knowledge in a *Textual* fashion. Friedburg defined ‘department stores’ as types of *Text*. The ‘flâneuse’ (gazer) was the nineteenth-century version of a female observer “whose gaze was mobilized in these new public spaces of modernity” (Friedburg, 1993: 36). When women were free to enter the city on their own, department stores became potential *textual environments* in which they could enter ‘free of charge’; in French and Belgian stores one still sees the sign ‘entrée libre/gratuite’ (meaning
free/free of charge) which saw its origin in the early days when one, for the first time, could enter a store just for the pleasure of looking without the necessity of buying; it became a new way to transfer knowledge, to realise their desires:

“The flâneuse appeared in the public spaces—department stores—made possible by the new configurations of consumer culture. The flâneuse was empowered in a paradoxical sense: new freedoms of lifestyle and “choice” were available, but, as feminist theorists have amply illustrated, women were addressed as consumers that played on deeply rooted cultural constructions of gender.”
(Friedburg, 1993: 36)

Mulvey’s discussion of the ‘cinematic gaze’ was also an expression of an essentially ‘readerly’ process where the meaning of the cinema is thought of in terms of what is experienced by the ‘gazer’ in the form of a ‘look’:

“In reality the fantasy world of the screen is subject to the law which produces it. Sexual instincts and identification processes have a meaning within the symbolic order which articulates desire. Desire, born with language allows the possibility of transcending the instinctual and the imaginary, but its point of reference continually returns to the traumatic moment of its birth: the castration complex. Hence the look, pleasurable in form, can be threatening on content, and it is woman as representation/image that crystallizes this paradox.”
(Mulvey, 1989: 18-19)

Reception theory, then, is an irrevocable development in the field of hermeneutics, and will become even more important when brought into contact with Multimedial Textuality which involves a combination of word, sound and image in a dynamic spatiotemporal context. In such situations so much more is communicated than just what the multimedial text means; it can also involve the dynamics of the way one looks at it, listens to its sounds and individualises its musical content.

3. MULTIMEDIAL TEXTUALITY AND INTERCULTURALITY

Taking the theory a step further, I propose that multimedia texts are intrinsically rhizomatic in nature according to the ‘rhizome’ model presented by Deleuze & Guattari. They use the rhizome to define a wide range of both natural and cultural phenomena to define a way of looking at reality; they use it as a metaphor for understanding our environment, and as a paradigm for comprehending a new approach to reality. In the way that the stasis of the Work is opposed to the dynamism of the ‘Text’ in Barthesian theory, in the theory of the rhizome, the image is opposed to the tracing, the point to the line. The rhizome is a system which is constantly in action, but which can support complete rupture from within; it is able, if broken, to send out shoots and repair itself; the ‘tracing’ however is but a photograph of a dynamic
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system in action and therefore cannot support any change. A fragment from a page long
definition of what the rhizome represents is included below:

“A rhizome as subterranean stem is absolutely different from roots and radicals.
Bulbs and tubers are rhizomes… Even some animals are, in their pack form. Rats are
rhizomes. Burrows are too, in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement,
evasion and breakout. The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms from ramified
surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers. … A rhizome
ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power,
and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic
chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also
perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive. There is no language in itself, nor are
there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patios, slangs, and specialised
languages.”

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 6-7)

The Work, then, is a ‘tracing’ whereas the Text is a rhizome; and therefore the multimedia
text, one that uses word, sounds and images to communicate, has the potential of being
radically rhizomatic. The ontology of the rhizome is enaction; it is very much ‘in the middle’
or ‘between’ things. Like music, the rhizome enacts the moment and propels you into the
future. According to Deleuze and Guattari, musical form, “right down to its ruptures and
proliferations” (ibid.: 11-12) is comparable to a weed or a rhizome, and is often an important
part of Multimedia textuality which is realised in a spatial and temporal environment.

As Lyotard notes, knowledge has become the principle force of production, and it is
interesting to note how quickly and how often knowledge is ‘downloaded’ off the web into
individual computers, interacted with via websites or through interactive multimedia
environments in the form of CD-ROMs. Because multimedia environments combine word, sound and image, the potential exists to communicate many different types of knowledge, some that were impossible to communicate via traditional textuality, i.e. through the relatively static process of reading. Search, however, comments on the fact that oral cultures are often ‘misrepresented’, even by multimedia publishers that try to breakdown intercultural barriers by attempting to adopt these forms. According to Search, however, “Once we understand the psychodynamics of orality and multimedia computing, we need to learn how to use the design of multimedia telecommunications to articulate and preserve cultural diversity” (Search: 63). Here it is clear that theory is gradually functioning to inform the world of multimodal textuality which has actually had little experience in intercultural work of any kind; many multimedia publishers began as the publishers of books, and the kinds of knowledge required for the latter form requires an enormous leap of faith. A good example of a situation which could be solved by multimodal textuality is the one presented by McGregor in his article on Gooniyandi narrative—involved with story telling among a tribe of Australian Aboriginals. McGregor comments on the difficulty of translating the ‘temporality’ implicit in Aboriginal textuality, as well as the dynamism of the ‘drawings’ that usually accompany the story-telling, often scraped into the sand (McGregor: 20). Multimedia, offering the opportunity to play with temporality and spatiality in a way not possible using traditional forms of textuality, provides dynamic new solutions to problems like these.

Kersenboom, in her foundational work involved with the subject of interactive multimedia, uses Tamil texts to explain the deficiency of traditional ‘translations’ which do not take into account the ‘oral’ culture which passes down the complex systems of hand movements (mudras) and abstract dance sequences which are essential for textual realisation. Similarly, the Balinese have ‘texts’ which also have dynamic ‘oral’ elements; simple ‘word for word’ translation is not possible. The Balinese refer to their texts as lontar or rontal whereas the members of Tamil culture refer to them as olai. Both terms signify texts which are inscribed into dried palm leaves. The spaces left after partly incising lines in the leaf is then rubbed over with some dark substance. Thanks to this the text and drawings become visible. These ‘texts’ have a relatively short lifetime if compared to our own vehicles of knowledge transferral: we still have a number of versions of the first bible printed by Gutenberg. The only long-lasting renditions of Balinese ancient texts were composed in the last century and even then have only survived in occidental libraries under strict environmental control (whereas in Asia they would have long ago disintegrated). The tradition of the lontar has always involved regular retranscription of the manuscripts. What actually happens is a dynamic reappraisal of the contents of the texts and there are very often changes and elaborations with each new transcription, at least in the form of a commentary on what it means. The Balinese and the Tamil may be ‘literate’ cultures in many senses, but they don’t seem to aspire to the same sense of permanency we connect to our vehicles of knowledge transferral (i.e. books).

The Balinese conception of literacy and the process of semiosis contrasts to our own in some other important ways. The Balinese word for ‘reading’, for example, is actually the same word as ‘singing’ or ‘reciting’, just as the Balinese word referring to the reading of ancient
texts uses a term which refers to a musical melody: *gendhing*. An important fact is that the Balinese consider signification to occur when a text is brought to life in a vocal context. Groups of older Balinese men—considered the most appropriate for the task—can often be heard ‘singing’ the texts together and commenting upon them in contemporary Balinese dialects. The texts themselves are in older languages such as Sanskrit and Old Javanese, languages which have important inflections and vocal intonations which can only by expressed verbally. The intention here is to demonstrate that our contemporary episteme (and that of the near future) will be able to produce interactive multimedia texts which will enable a correct translation of works such as Tamil *olai* or Balinese *lontar*, suggesting a new paradigm for realising textuality in a multimedia format in the future.

4. THE ORIGIN OF MULTIMEDIA TEXTUALITY

At this stage there is still a strong reverence for books and the beginning-middle-end type of literacy implicit in the way we experience things. We can, however, observe some forms of deviation to these generally accepted givens. Non-linear narrative involving active interaction was present while I was still at school: I can still remember the *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels for children where the reader’s path through the book was based on choices the reader made him or herself. Many possible endings existed, and the number of conclusions were multiform; the reader was propelled through the narrative by rapidly changing pages with each new decision. In a dynamic active sense, comparable to the Balinese ‘readings’ which involved both an inflected recital or singing (and most importantly the discussions afterwards about their meanings in a contemporary setting), also has a parallel. Role-playing games (referred to as RPGs) such as *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Call of Cthulhu* have people discussing the choices they will make in an imaginary world created by the ‘master’ of the game, mediating between the players and the imaginary world they have to interface with. Here the text is highly dynamic, the outcome of the ‘texts’ depending on their decisions and interactions with others. Similarly, as mentioned a group of old Balinese men can be seen sitting down together ‘performing’ a text. One of the group reads the ancient text in its prescribed style, then the passages are translated and alternative ways of looking at the text are discussed until a consensus is reached. The Balinese have a term to refer to this dynamic form of signification: *Desa Kala Patra* which translates simply to ‘place’, ‘time’ and ‘circumstance’ meaning that any given event has a different significative potential in each new environment. Perhaps the role-playing game was one of our first major encounters with a non-linear form of knowledge interpretation and transferral.

Moving from here to other forms of multimedia textuality, such as the Electronic Book, is not such a big jump. The whole concept of the electronic book has been in circulation for a number of years, so it’s not as if we are suddenly on the brink of an awesome chasm of dangerous and frightening change. People seem to be either entirely for or against the electronic book, vehemently so. On the one hand, those who have followed the gradual acceptance of the CD-ROM as a means of knowledge transferral through the nineties herald
in the glory of the electronic book which will supposedly outdate the traditional book format. On the other hand, there are those who believe that the book itself, as a physical object, will never lose its value, having played such an important role in the development of our culture. Being in the early days, reactions and responses are still fairly emotive and unpredictable.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF THE INTERNET

The internet has been the primary impetus for this dynamic new approach to textuality. Thanks to the internet, authors are able to go directly from their writing to the public, totally unmediated by publishing houses. It is interesting to note that the internet was originally created for academic use. From this environment it spread through international academic circles, and afterwards it eventually began to influence the general public where it is continuing to gain in popularity for any manner of communication. It is logical, therefore, that text-books are one of the first symbolic vehicles to fall into the dark chasm of change.

Another important medium benefiting from the change thanks to the influence of the internet is the library. Today as electronic publications and journals are increasing in popularity the library is falling under the influence of the internet. Catenazzi and Gibb comment on the fact that “in the context of electronic publishing, a new actor has emerged which was not encountered in the traditional publishing process: the server” (Catenazzi and Gibb: 165). Libraries are becoming more and more ‘virtual’, which is a sign of foreboding for traditional forms of knowledge transferral such as the book. For many this is a worrying development seeing that the library has always been a bastion of safe permanence.

It is also thanks to the internet that the whole phenomenon of hypertext has entered our vocabulary. It is, though, far more than simply a word; it is an approach to reading that has been assisting a gradual epistemic transformation in our culture. The term itself describes a unique way of navigating oneself through a given document. What is unique about it is the fact that the path through the text is not necessarily ‘sequential’, i.e. beginning, middle, end as prescribed in our traditional approach to narrative. Instead, the reader can navigate his or her own way through the document by clicking on any of the options. The function performed by hypertext isn’t entirely new. In this document I’ve already referred to the ‘choose your own adventure’ books for children which provided the readers with a range of options sending them through the book non-sequentially, meaning that the ‘ending’ of the story depended entirely on the choice of the reader. Hypertext however has had a far wider impact because of its presence as an essential element of the internet and other forms of computer-mediated communication. In addition to this, it is becoming a more typical educational media meaning that today’s children are being educated on an entirely different textual form than the teachers. This is threatening to publishers because its general use will shift the attention of a generation of potential readers to hypertext-influenced means of communication (such as the ebook).

This provides a great deal more possibilities for communication than are made possible by traditional publishing houses. There are in fact many different ways that the role played by the
publisher is being extended, and in this article we can only skim over the surface of the amount of contrasting technology. Basically, there are two major forms which are now actively being produced. On the one hand we have information which is accessible (sometimes for a price) via the internet, and on the other the ubiquitous CD-ROM. These two forms deal with the same type of information, but surprisingly connote an entirely different epistemological viewpoint.

This contrast is an important one. The internet, as discussed, is a constantly changing medium, expressing an epistemic shift and a new way of approaching textuality. The CD-ROM seems to be part of this expression, especially thanks to its possibly ‘interactive’ nature. It is surprising, then, that the CD-ROM has come to represent the permanence which used to be held by the book as a safe form of knowledge storage and transferral. Although there are present doubts as to whether we can actually rely on the CD-ROM as a permanent means, there are many of us who have developed the feeling that the knowledge is ‘safe’ if it is on a CD-ROM, safer than being on a computer, a computer-diskette and even perhaps safer than in a ‘book’ with cover, spine and individual pages. For many of us the CD-ROM represents a permanence that has come to represent a form of knowledge which will outlive our culture after we have become extinct, a form of knowledge more reliable and permanent than the human brain, the perfect form of untarnishable knowledge which is longed for by empirical science.

Publishers are attempting to grasp these new options and take advantage of them for their own economic advantage, some more successful than others. We are beginning to notice experimental writing styles which involve audience interaction (on the internet) or communicational ‘texts’ which come to exist through interaction with others. Here I’m referring to two possible situations. The first is a text—such as an introductory booklet or a technical manual—which can be adjusted by a number of people who are authorised to have access to it. The other is involved with bulletin boards or chat rooms where individuals can contribute to a discussion in some way. Both forms involve the internet and express dynamic ways of contributing to a ‘living’ text. Although such texts on the internet are relatively scarce when compared to more traditional websites, the potential is phenomenal considering the amount of people who will have access to this information.

Another important facet in contemporary internet communication is involved with both access to the web and CD-ROMs: the enormous body of knowledge held on a single CD can be made available to a wide variety of clients via the internet. The licence to such items are very often sold with certain products, allowing the buyer, for example, to in some way update his or her CD-ROM with new information downloaded from the web. These licences are sometimes permanent and sometimes valid for a restricted period (after which the buyer has to pay some type of subscription cost). This is a clever marketing tool which makes the amount of knowledge attainable by one purchase incredibly large, perhaps undermining most of all the attractiveness of a book collection so large that it wouldn’t be able to fit into one room only (or perhaps an entire house). CD-ROMs, of course, are also accessible via networks, sometimes through the internet and sometimes through libraries.
5. CONCLUSION

Despite the many foreboding signs presented by this new technology, I am of the opinion that multimedia textuality will become an important way to transfer knowledge in educational environments, but that the book—the ‘Work’ in the Barthesian sense—will never lose its place in our culture. We are a book-based culture in that our conception of knowledge is based on our traditional acceptance of the permanency of books and of the whole issue of literacy. We are also possessive: we like to know that we can have what we use, and that we can hold it physically. Downloaded texts don’t have this physical characteristic at all. All the same, there are two other streams of virtual reality which must be considered. The first is involved with the decay of the multivolumed encyclopedia. People are buying these less and less considering the fact that we can fit an equal amount of knowledge on one or two CDs. MP-3 files are also becoming more and more popular, and they exist as streams of digital information sometimes stored in an impermanent form on a device purchased deliberately to play music downloaded from the web. As you can see, a whole new generation of young people are growing up with highly contrasting ways of approaching knowledge. Is this a difficult transition period for the traditional book? Yes to some extent. Young people of today may be becoming adept at accessing computer knowledge, but I still think the way we approach and disseminate our literature—very much involved with the reading process and the beginning/middle/end epistemological condition—will command respect amount young people and foster a positive attitude to books. I am of the opinion that the ebook, internet and CD-ROMs may change the way we approach the book in certain contexts, but I think that this will function to enrich our understanding of communication rather than changing it permanently from one form into another. The traditional book will therefore remain an important communicative vehicle in our culture.