FCJ-011 Textual Dreaming: Dis-Ease in the Interface

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New media presents us with a diverse range of texts which tend to manifest through the centrality of the interface. The interface is often argued as the most important part of any digital application (i.e. Bolter and Gromala 2003: 11). It becomes the surface upon, or perhaps through, which a range of forces and discourses converge and intersect. It can also be argued that these discourses are subsumed within a particular idea of the interface, and in some instances can efface what is at stake in new media texts. In particular, and what this paper investigates, is the question of textuality itself, the limits and liberties of textual models. This paper problematises the notion of the interface with a notion of models of textuality, and considers some of the implications for the future of reading.

A model of textuality is not a natural thing; it is (a) technology. A textual model provides an infrastructure which determines and articulates the structure and possibilities of relationships between those elements of the textual infrastructure – texts, subjects, and their relationships. As a consequence of this infrastructure, the model also largely determines the possibilities for reading and writing within the textual system.

The print-based system of texts, for example, is a thoroughly naturalised and representational mode of textuality which has provided an infrastructure and prescribed and delimited the forms of its objects and relations for three hundred years. The print-based textual system has always presented an infrastructure that consists of a two-dimensional surface to which it sutures a subject in a face-to-face relationship – the requirement is for a certain kind of text, a certain kind of subject, and a certain kind of relationship between them – a highly prescribed and circumscribed textual infrastructure. This model of textuality is assumed as the natural mode of textuality, and consequently the referent for all textuality. What is obscured in the naturalisation of the print model of textuality are the technological dimensions of textuality: that all textual models are technologies. This print model has become so naturalised that it 'disappears'.

Print and screen based texts (including moving image texts such as film, television and multimedia productions, and simulated 3D texts) conform to this representational model. The close relationship between a print infrastructure and representationalism can be demonstrated through a brief archaeology: a dominant representationalism can be shown to reside in the print model which we can explicate here in terms of Heidegger's notion of the 'Age of the World Picture' (Heidegger, 1977). The problem in representationalism is that everything that is is an object for a subject. In terms of subjects and objects, the essential point Heidegger makes concerns 'the necessary interplay between subjectivism and objectivism' and that it is 'precisely this reciprocal conditioning of one by the other that points back to events more profound' (Heidegger, 1977: 128).

For Heidegger, in the representationalist paradigm, the very essence of 'man' changes in that 'man becomes subject'. He is very specific about what this means, pointing out that the word sub-iectum in fact names 'that-which-lies-before', and which 'as ground, gathers everything onto itself' (Heidegger, 1977: 128). When man becomes primary, as the only real subiectum, then 'man becomes that being upon which all that is is grounded as regards the manner of its Being and its truth'. It is only possible for man to become this relational centre when 'the comprehension of what is as a whole changes' (Heidegger, 1977: 128). In terms of this change, Heidegger says, we are asking after the 'essence of the modern age' which concerns the 'modern world picture [Weltbild]'.

> [W]orld picture, when understood essentially, does not mean a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture. What is, in its entirety, is now taken in such a way that it first is in being and only is in being to the extent that it is set up by man, who represents and sets forth. Whenever we have the world picture, an essential decision takes place regarding what is, in its entirety. The Being of whatever is, is sought and found in the representedness of the latter.

And further, that:

> The world picture does not change from an earlier medieval one into a modern one, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age. (Heidegger, 1977: 129-130)

Modern representing, as we follow it through Heidegger, demonstrates a representational subject constituted and positioned within the system. Positionality is important to representationalism: it

requires positionality in order to represent. In this sense, the general structural relations of the print model make it easy for representationalism and the subject of the age of print is broadly defined by these structural elements and relations of a print economy and model of textuality. The print subject is sutured to the page or screen and this always provides it with a representable position. The subject of representationalism therefore comes to appear as naturally given, just as, in this view, technology is also a given. Positionality concerns fixation, or what can be held to be true. Positionality is what Deleuze and Guattari oppose to nomadism which concerns constant movement and circulation.

11 Heidegger noted the significance of the concept of positionality to representationalism. The establishing of 'man' the subject as ground for that which is, positions man in an entirely different way from that of medieval or ancient man. In fact, he says, for the first time there became such a thing as a 'position' of man. Man is subiectum, and must stand in front of, or 'take his stand in relation to whatever is as the objective'.

12 > What is decisive is that man himself expressly takes up this position as one constituted by himself, that he intentionally maintains it as that taken up by himself, and that he makes it secure as the solid footing for a possible development of humanity. (Heidegger, 1977: 132)

13 This decisive event, for Heidegger, is what begins a new way of being human ('the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole') that gives rise to the world as picture. It is not surprising that a mass textual system or model (the printing press of the fifteenth century) that becomes dominant during this same period serves to instantiate this model of 'man'. This is an actualisation of the technology of the subiectum, the age of the world picture, that is henceforth demanded in order to produce and to represent this 'man', and to represent him to himself. This rather remarkable technological subject of the age of print is constituted and positioned within the infrastructure of a print economy as it must function in the age of the world picture.

14 Representationalism requires a stable formation in order to function, and infusions of noise into the system are rendered as pathologies, especially of the subject positioned within the system. Immersive virtual reality, for example, in that it disrupts or introduces something that is apparently new into the system, becomes a pathologisation of the subject, and it is on this basis that claims are often made that there is a crisis in modes of subjectivity. Springer, for example, asserts that 'As does all the computer rhetoric analysed in this book, VR discourses reveal an intense crisis in modes of subjectivity' (Springer, 1996: 81). Within this model, it becomes a question of repositioning the subject such that the subject may be accommodated in an expanded representational regime. Such claims of crises in modes of subjectivity and for new subject positions always refer to a print-based economy and infrastructure. The need for positionality within the model presumes or pre-scribes the necessity of a position for the subject, in order for the model to maintain itself. New or different subject positions within a print model are changes in degree, and this subject always remains the same kind of subject (positioned in a face to face relationship with the text, and likewise the text remains the same kind of two-dimensional text).

15 So, if these are the dimensions of the print-based model of textuality, what is then offered to us beyond these dimensions is something that can be called a post-print model of textuality. A post-print model will have to concern a change in kind rather than changes in degree (i.e. different/new subject positions etc.): a change in kind will require a different infrastructure – different kinds of texts, different kinds of subjects, and different kinds of relationships between them. This is the crucial difference between the print and the post-print models: that it concerns changes in kind rather than changes in degree. It is the infrastructure of the model that changes rather than simply a realignment or repositioning of constituent elements. The nature of these elements also changes – the subject shifts from fixed, positional and representational to one which is set in motion, and what is decisive is this question of movement. This decisive change is akin to the point Deleuze makes in The Fold in relation to a transformation of monadology to nomadology, that the conditions of the problem itself change.

16 > The same construction of the point of view over the city continues to be developed, but now it is neither the same point of view nor the same city, now that both the figure and the ground are in movement in space. (Deleuze, 1993: 136)

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In this deterritorialisation of accepted notions of space, something has changed, Deleuze says, in the situation of monads, between the 'closed chapel with imperceptible openings' and 'the sealed car speeding down the dark highway' (Deleuze, 1993: 136-137). In a post-print model this ground has also changed, a question of movement and a different relationship to space.

The significant questions in terms of textual space will concern how the dimensions of a post-print model can be specified and demonstrated and, as subjects of this model, how we can engage with such post-print texts and textuality? What are reading and writing in such environments? What would also need to be asked is whether such a post-print model is or can be post-representational.

A fully three-dimensional text will necessarily have to exceed the specifications of the print-based two dimensional model of textuality, yet what we currently refer to as 3D texts displayed on two-dimensional screens do not escape the structure of the print model. Current 3D texts are simulations which always remain two dimensional. Some simulated three-dimensional environments, specifically, immersive virtual reality, however, do present a hybrid model of textuality. These kinds of texts conform to the order of the print model in that the infrastructure remains (the screen as a head mounted display is sutured ever closer to the representational subject), whilst at the same time they also provide for a subject 'within' the text and in motion (moving through the 'space' of the text).

What such hybrid models depend upon in order to achieve a simulated post-print model is a changed concept of information. What these simulation technologies provide is a visualisation, an imaging, of information as constituting the textual worlds (re)presented. One of the significant ways in which this changed conception of information has developed over the past few decades and has entered into popular consciousness has been through cyberpunk science fiction, and especially through the work of William Gibson and the very idea of cyberspace. Information is the crucial constituent, or constitutive element, of cyberspace. Steve Jonathanes has pointed out that:

> The clearest statements of cyberpunk ideology come from contemporary science fiction texts that combine information, technology and ideology to construct a reality in a near future (a time that seems almost parallel to the present rather than ahead of it) in which information fuels not only the global economy but individual existence. (Jonathanes, 1994: 81)

Rudy Rucker's Software was perhaps the first to be explicit about the primary focusing on information, although it was Gibson who provides the imagery, the visual metaphor of cyberspace. This visual metaphor is crucial. We first 'see' cyberspace in Gibson's 'Burning Chrome', first published in 1981, in which the matrix is produced as a visual metaphor.

> The matrix is an abstract representation of the relationships between data systems. Legitimate programmers jack into their employers' sector of the matrix and find themselves surrounded by bright geometries representing corporate data.
>
> Towers and fields of it ranged in the colorless nonspace of the simulation matrix, the electronic consensus-hallucination that facilitates the handling and exchange of massive quantities of data. Legitimate programmers never see the walls of ice they work behind, the walls of shadow that screen their operations from others, from industrial espionage artists and hustlers like Bobby Quine. (Gibson, 1988: 196-197)

Gibson's description of the matrix was conceptually revolutionary. Precisely what is conceptually revolutionary is, as Wills points out:

> the transformation of data representations from the print medium to that of representational graphics, and along with that the use of sensors or dermatrodes attached to the head to relay brain signals or mental representations directly into the computing system, again bypassing traditional language systems. (Wills, 1995: 67)

The often quoted 'original and authentic' definition of cyberspace from Gibson is:

> Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts … . A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding. (Gibson, 1988: 67)

However, this is precisely the point at which we need to rethink the production of the metaphor of cyberspace, rather that accepting this definition at face-value. Firstly, Gibson's text should be read a little more closely for its context. The context of this 'definition' in Neuromancer is that it is 'spoken' as a voice-over on a television program being watched by the two main characters, Molly and Case. The program, or what we know about it from the text, can be seen as mimicking a particular style of documentary film-making. In Gibson's text it is the authorial voice-over of the omniscient narrator which delivers the statement that has become the famous quote. The context arrives immediately following the television voice over:

30 'What's that?' Molly asked, as he flipped the channel selector.

31 'Kid's show.' A discontinuous flood of images as the selector cycled. 'Off,' he said to the Hosaka. (Gibson, 1988: 68)

32 And so now the definition of cyberspace that has captured the imagination of the world is revealed as being for 'kids'. This 'definition' should be read as provisional, as a point of departure for an exploration of textual worlds beyond the imag(in)ability of a print model. These kinds of misreading often seem to plague the dystopic textual worlds and characters of Gibson's work. Throughout his texts, Gibson has frequently been attempting to engage sophisticated and complex senses of informational environments and the possibilities of our relationships with them.

33 The characterisation of cyberspace in Gibson is richer than the decontextualised quotation first indicates. What we find in Gibson is that cyberspace from the very beginning attempts to exceed the infrastructure of the print model, firstly through the dream of directly 'jacking in' to the matrix via dermatrodes attached to the head, a dream of bypassing language in favour of direct access to a 'virtual' visual 'reality'. Later, in Idoru (1996) for example, this dream is abandoned in favour of a return to the physical structure of the print model through the use of 'eyephones' which is closer to what we understand as an immersive virtual reality environment. Significantly, Gibson's environments always concern three dimensional space and a mobile subject position, or rather, a return to a body that is able to move, and to act, within the (textual) space. The crucial point here is that cyberspace is an event of information. We will shortly examine Gibson's Idoru, especially for the way in which he engages with the contemporary metaphorics of information as networked fields of information flow, and nodes of intensity within fields of information flow, and crucially engages the possibilities of reading (within) such environments (Gibson, 1996).

34 Firstly, however, we will examine a contemporary textual example which explores textuality and reading through three levels of the hybrid interface. In Windows and Mirrors: Interaction design, Digital Art, and the Myth of Transparency, Jay David Bolter and Diane Gromala explore and analyse a number of examples of digital and installation art from the SIGGRAPH 2000 exhibition (Bolter and Gromala, 2003). The analyses are based in Bolter's now familiar theoretical work on remediation and associated concepts that have previously been explicated in Remediation: Understanding New Media (Bolter and Grusin, 1999). The concept of remediation is significant in new media in terms of explaining the continuities between media forms and the associated concepts of transparency and reflection. 'Remediation' is the name Bolter and Grusin have given to 'the representation of one medium in another', and they argue that 'remediation is a defining characteristic of the new digital media' (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 45). By its very nature, however, remediation is conservative: in that it concerns the reinvestment of preceding media forms into new forms, and what might be new in these forms tends to be subsumed or assimilated to the infrastructure of the preceding form. As we will find in the example below, remediation seems unable to apprehend the changed infrastructure, and what might be new tends to be reduced to the notion of the production of (an) 'experience' which finally tends to render a new form in terms of preceding forms and their textual model.

35 Bolter and Gromala examine the fascinating example of Magic Book from the Emerging Technologies exhibit at SIGGRAPH 2000 in a chapter titled 'Magic Book: The New and the Old in New Media'(Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 76-93). Bolter and Gromala describe Magic Book in similar terms to the description provided on the designer's web site, and quoted below:

36 Magic Book explores the transition between Physical Reality, Augmented Reality (AR), and immersive Virtual Reality (VR) in a collaborative setting. A Magic Book looks like a regular storybook with colorful pages and simple text. When readers look at the same pages wearing lightweight head

> mounted displays (HMD), the pictures pop off the page and come to life as three-dimensional animated virtual scenes. By touching a switch on the HMD, readers can fly into the virtual scene and freely explore the immersive environment. Several readers can gather around a single Magic Book and experience it together. Wearing HMDs, each reader can view AR scenes from their own perspective or fly into the immersive world and see each other represented as avatars in the same virtual scene. Readers that remain in the AR setting have a God's eye view of their fellow readers as miniature avatars in the virtual scene before them. (https://www.hitl.washington.edu/magicbook/)

37 Magic Book presents three textual infrastructures within the one text. The first two, the conventional book and the pop-up book (what are called physical and augmented realities, but both still 'books') still conform to the infrastructure of the print model, whilst the third (immersive virtual reality) makes the transition to a post-print model (albeit simulated). The second, the 'pop-up' book, emerges as an intermediate stage where the text becomes three dimensional but in which the subject is still excluded and must 'view' the text from the outside, a textual structure which recalls the three-dimensional stereoscope of the nineteenth century. If two people are reading Magic Book, one in augmented reality ('pop-up' book) and the other in virtual reality (immersive), both will have avatars in the text. The augmented reality reader will view both avatars in the third person (because this reader's subject position or 'view' is external to the text. The virtual reality reader, on the other hand, will experience her avatar in the first person, as the body which moves within the text.

38 Bolter and Gromala describe Magic Book as an experiment in remediation which begins with the printed book. They say that the designer's desire was to take the experience of a conventional printed book and to 'imitate, enhance, and ultimately refashion in digital technology' and to 'bring out the multiple levels of experience that were latent in a printed storybook' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 80). The differences between textual models are subsumed under the name of remediation and under the strategy of designing an experience – they say that 'to design a digital artefact is to design an experience' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 22). In imitating and enhancing the physical book the referent remains the printed book and therefore the textual infrastructure that supports it, and the differences between the models of textuality presented in these three versions is effaced within the term 'experience'. This is what makes it remediation for Bolter and Gromala ('remediation as a conscious design strategy'), but it is also this conservatism of remediation which inhibits its ability to examine what is or might be new other than what might be an effect of remediation.

39 The significance of this discussion concerning textual models becomes more apparent when we consider what reading is in these models. Bolter and Gromala say that Magic Book 'is an experiment in the meaning of reading, a radical remediation' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 80). But just what is this mode of reading, and reading practices, which engage this text?

40 Bolter and Gromala's analysis, consistent with the designer's website, is concerned with the interface, with reading the interface. The content of the text is almost immaterial in this analysis, and passed over in favour of the interface: the singular reference to content is to the reader being able to 'see colorful gnome-like characters and read a simple story' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 78). Reading the interface in this context is, I suggest, about 'experiencing' and coming to understand something of the unfamiliar textual infrastructure, as it is within this context that the possibilities of reading will manifest.

41 For Bolter and Gromala, when 'the author's style of telling the story is compelling, a printed book can metaphorically immerse the reader in the story. The Magic Book renders the metaphor visual' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 80). The reader's metaphorical immersion in the story of a conventional printed book, however, is not non-visual, the reader imag(in)es the world they construct with the text – a line of flight, escaping the pre-scription of the text in (everyday) reading practices, the subject's escape from complete determination through negotiation of meaning in the activity of reading.

42 What is happening then in the metaphor being rendered visual? It appears to be a prescription that, in what was formerly the work of the reader in imag(in)ing the textual world, has now become a pre-scribed visual world. What is the work of the reader beyond this prescription, beyond simply 'seeing' what is already placed there? We seem to have returned to Heidegger and

the image of the world grasped as picture, and apparently excluding the possibility of a post-representationalism.

43 I suggest that the problem is of the same order as with remediation discussed above, that what occurs in remediation's colonising activity is also the (re)investment of a dominant representationalism. An insistence on remediation as the 'defining characteristic of the new digital media' also becomes an insistence on rendering the new form (as) representational. The problem in a sense is a certain latent ideology of remediation, and particularly of the conception of reading it seems to assume. Reading, in the Bolter and Gromala analysis (and consistent with the Magic Book designer's), is equated to 'seeing', to seeing what is (re)presented.

44 Bolter and Gromala report that when the designers of Magic Book asked themselves the question, 'what is reading?', their answer was that:

> 45 to read is to be transported to a world that the reader can see with her mind's eye. The augmented reality interface allows the reader to see that world in three dimensions not with her mind's eye, but with her physical vision. The enhanced view is in turn followed and reimagined by the fully immersive experience of virtual reality'. (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 80-81)

46 Reading, however, is never simple reception, whatever the nature of the text. 'Rendering the metaphor visual' doesn't of itself exceed simple reception, and if to read is 'to be transported' then we should also think metaphor more carefully. Derrida argues metaphor in terms of transportation and circulation, that we cannot speak of metaphor without using it, and that metaphor conveys us as its inhabitants.

> 47 We are in a certain way – metaphorically of course, and as concerns the mode of habitation – the content and the tenor of this vehicle: passengers, comprehended and displaced by metaphor. (Derrida, 1978: 6)

48 With this notion of metaphor, metaphor is always already event. There is 'nothing that does not happen with metaphor and by metaphor', and nothing 'gets along without metaphor'; and even more importantly 'it should be said that metaphor gets along without anything else, here without me, at the very moment when it appears to pass through me' (Derrida, 1978: 8). Rendering the metaphor visual, and with reading being a question of seeing within this paradigm, would then be a (re)incorporation back into representationalism, the metaphor reduced from event to thing.

49 Reading is an event, an activity of production, of negotiating and producing meaning in the engagement of a text and a subject. Barthes' distinction between the 'work' and the 'text' is still relevant here:

> 50 The work can be held in the hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse … or again, the Text is experienced only in an activity of production. (Barthes, 1977: 157)

51 What is the 'work' in digital production? The digital text is a highly and precisely coded material artefact (the fact that it is a synthetic CD or on the hard drive of a computer as opposed to bound paper does not change this sense of the 'work'), including its graphic (re)presentations. For Barthes, reading is not a process of interpreting an essence but is an activity of production (a writing) that is a negotiation of meaning between reader and text, and therefore always social, always based in a desire to engage with something other.

52 In Bolter and Gromala, these questions of reading and textual models are subsumed within the argument they present that 'to design a digital artefact is to design an experience' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 22). For them, a digital experience 'does not simply enhance the delivery of information. The information itself becomes an experience' (Bolter and Gromala, 2003: 23). What notion of experience and what notion of information is at work here? Reading has always been an experience, an engagement in an activity of production. Here, however, there is an insistence on the 'experience' as some kind of abstract entity in itself – one experiences an experience, and this is the experience of 'information' (that amorphous and ubiquitous term that means everything and nothing at the same time). Do we take it that reading is now a matter of 'experiencing information' visually – is this a return to the concept of literal reading ('it means what it looks like')?

53 In Magic Book, it is a question of 'reading' the interface or interfaces, and these three interfaces have been presented in the form of representational graphics. The 'experience' provided in this imagery is an experience of the interface, particularly of the difference between these three interfaces. The immersive virtual reality version of Magic Book, however, is more an experience of

the changed relationships between the reader and text. The crucial difference is that, in being 'immersed' within the text, the reader can 'fly into the immersive world' (cf Deleuze's metaphor of 'the sealed car … etc.'), and the 'experience' is at the same time the fading of the familiar conventions of the print infrastructure and an engagement with the beginnings of a post-print model – unless it comes to be remediated back to representation.

54 All this passes through the interface. The interface is always between two faces – always in your face, and you face up to it, whatever … one stands before it as subiectum. This notion of 'experience' is a fascination with the interface. In maintaining the 'printed book', or more precisely the print model of textuality as referent, remediation tends to assume this single model of textuality that can be enhanced and expanded to incorporate other forms (which must always refer back to print texts). It assumes textuality as a single and apparently natural and organic entity rather than as a technology. The naturalised interface is always the two dimensional surface of the 'originary' textual model, and what is glossed are the technical and infrastructural conventions of such a model of textuality – its prescriptions for subjects and texts and the relationships between them.

55 On the other hand, some conventional print texts explicitly interrogate the very model they are immersed in, and engage with the possibilities of it being otherwise. William Gibson's Idoru is such a text: it explores, as its content matter, the possibilities of reading within a three dimensional textual environment. It has much to say about the subtleties and complexity of reading in this environment which is imag(in)ed via holographic technologies.

56 Idoru assumes the metaphorics of information discussed earlier in terms of information fields – as flows, nodes and resistances within information fields. Gibson has developed the notion of the hologram over multiple texts from his first published short story Fragments of a Hologram Rose in 1977 (Gibson, 1988). Idoru, however, presents the most sophisticated treatment and exploration of holography as a textual future, relations between information and subjectivity within such an environment, and produces a sustained (fictional) engagement with what reading might be in an informational three-dimensional textuality. Within this informational environment, subjects and subjectivity are exposed to a range of new forces and intensities, immersed within flows of information which pass by and pass through as subjectivity is constituted as nodal points in this flow. In this scene, subjectivity is constituted, and constitutes itself, on the basis of its being-with and in information, and crucially that it returns a body to the text that can (inter-) act within this environment. These forces produce a radical change in subjectivity, and this is one of the major transformations that is explored and mediated by Gibson in the figure of the hologram. Rei Toei, the Idoru character in Idoru, is a hologram, constructed according to popular conceptions of beauty and celebrity. The notion of the holographic character is firstly opened up by the device of the central character of the text, Laney (a later version of the 'console cowboy' of Gibson's Sprawl series). Laney has his weaknesses and idiosyncrasies, but is here produced as working with more sophisticated notions of information in the digital, networked era. Laney's 'gift' is a certain attitude or approach, a special ability in relation to information which is given the name nodal vision, and which is specified as a mode of reading. Nodal vision is different from the way the 'console jockeys' of the Sprawl series were wired up with dermatrodes in a direct relation of brain, and mind, to information. Nodal vision emphasises sight, but crucially marks it with a difference in that Laney uses eyephones for his 'reading': the 'phones' invoking a notion of hearing as well as seeing, and carrying a sense of embodiment.

57 Laney is sought after by corporations for this special ability and so, for his living, scans information networks. He 'divines' information, and is able to 'sense' nodal points (or intensities) in information flows. His special ability can be located in the relation of information to his 'subjectivity'. The importance of the character of Laney lies in the way he is used to explore a particular notion of information and our relations to and in it; and also that this character is able to disrupt our conventional relationship to information. In the first instance, the text sets up Laney's special ability, his nodal vision, in this way:

58 > [H]e was an intuitive fisher of patterns of information: of the sort of signature a particular individual inadvertently created in the net as he or she went about the mundane yet endlessly multiplex business of life in a digital society. Laney's concentration-deficit, too slight to register on some

> scales, made him a natural channel-zapper, shifting from program to program, from database to database, from platform to platform, in a way that was, well, intuitive.
>
> Laney was the equivalent of a dowser, a cybernetic waterwitch. He couldn't explain how he did what he did. He just didn't know (Gibson, 1996: 25)

Laney's process of coming to 'know' (to know what it is that he does) is partly what the novel is about, because 'coming to know' in this context is about our (as readers) coming to know about our changing relationship to information. The complexity in the (re)construction of these relationships comes from the fact that the impetus for change in the text is provided by the politicisation of the process of coming to know. The text's statement in this respect is that there can be no innocent knowing, no innocent reading; and even though this is not forced as a prominent outcome of the text, it does gesture towards a coming to politics of the information age. This is explicitly set up by instantiating an ethics in relation to this mode of reading, the nodal vision, through his previous employment. When he is at DatAmerica he is unaware of the context of the information he is uncovering (Gibson, 1996: 25-26). His initial orientation is to information as intrinsically neutral and innocent.

Although he begins his next job at Slitscan with the same orientation, Laney's transformation is brought about by the effects of Slitscan's methods, carried out by him, on a woman called Alison Shires (Gibson, 1996: 23). The transformation was effected partly as a result of his nodal vision. In this way, the nodal vision is presented, crucially, as requiring an ethics as well as an aesthetics. Slitscan hires him after he demonstrates that in half an hour he is able to produce information that had taken 'three experienced researchers a month to excavate'. The ethics of the operation are immediately problematised in a complex knot of relations between the personal, the corporate, and the state.

> 'Some of that was illegal,' Laney said. 'You're tied into parts of DatAmerican that you aren't supposed to be.'
>
> 'Do you know what a nondisclosure agreement is, Laney?' (Gibson, 1996: 38)

Laney's ability makes him a hit at Slitscan as he is able to hone in on sensitive or key data in almost any chaotic mass of information. The Alison Shires incident demonstrates three significant points in terms of the nodal vision. Briefly, Alison Shires is investigated, in order to be publicly exposed, because she is thought to be having an affair with a certain celebrity. The outcome of the investigation, from Laney's nodal pursuit of her, is that she kills herself. Crucially, however, Laney knows, through his practice, that she has sensed his presence, his scrutiny of her; and he also becomes aware, beforehand, that she will kill herself.

The first point relates to her becoming aware of, rather, her sensing, the investigation. That is, in this mode of reading, if one subject (Laney) can come to know another (Alison Shires) intimately through the nodal scanning of their data, through a scanning that functions largely via an extension of his subjectivity to incorporate what she does in her daily activities, then she can also become aware of his invasion or rape of her (her as data, but in this context, still her). From this we then have the second point: that such a mode of reading, subjectivity, and relation to information is potentially dangerous. It has actual consequences, since she kills herself, and hence there are serious ethical issues in this practice. The third point arises later in the text when Laney revisits the site of her personal data following her death. He finds that the nodal point has gone, and her site has reduced – 'not a shrinkage so much as a tidying, a folding in'.

> The nodal point had formed where she had lived, while she had lived, in the messy, constantly proliferating interface with the ordinary yet endlessly multiplex world. Now there was no longer an interface. (Gibson, 1996: 115-116)

This is a world, and a mode of reading, that marks data as equivalent to life: Laney remembers his 'apprehension of her data-death' in what would seem to be a distillation of a proposition expounded by a character in DeLillo's White Noise, that we are the sum of our data (DeLillo, 1986: 141). The text follows immediately with Laney's first attempt to access the nodal points of the data of the celebrity character Rez. But Laney is unable to access any nodal points in his data because the data he is given is not of Rez; that is, it is data that has been compiled by others about him, and nodal vision crucially operates on the basis of what the subject does. Rez is invisible to him in this data and Laney will have to meet him. The concept of nodality here is to a lived relation, and it

is no certain thing. Laney elaborates, later, to a co-worker about why he was unable to find the nodal points in the Rez data:

> Rez doesn't generate patterns I can read, because everything he does is at one remove. It's like looking at an annual report for the personal habits of the chairman of the board. It's not going to be there. ... If I enter a specific area, I don't get any sense of how the data there relates to the rest of it, see? It's got to be relational. (Gibson, 1996: 148)

Laney has been hired by the security people for Rez who is a rock/video star from the group 'Lo/Rez'. Rez's security people, Blackwell and Yamazaki, are concerned about Rez's stated intention to marry Rei Toei who, since she is a hologram, does not exist. She is the Idoru, or idol-singer, whom Yamazaki describes to Laney in these preliminary and instrumental terms: 'She is a personality construct, a congeries of software agents, the creation of software-designers' (Gibson, 1996: 92). From this definition, Laney imagines her as an 'industrial strength synthesis of Japan's last three dozen top female media faces ... their features algorithmically derived from some human mean of proven popularity' (Gibson, 1996: 175). Later, he comes to understand her as considerably more, and considerably more complex, than this; and it is this development of the holographic character, its relations to information, and its convergence with the human in the marriage with Rez that constitutes the primary conceit of the text. Rez later describes the Idoru in the following terms, and as more than the sum of her data.

> 'Rei's only reality is the realm of ongoing serial creation,' Rez said. 'Entirely process; infinitely more than the combined sum of her various selves. The platforms sink beneath her, one after another, as she grows denser and more complex.' (Gibson, 1996: 202)

Laney eventually meets Rez, but it is his meeting with Rei Toei shortly afterwards when they sit for the meal that is most illuminating. We find here something of the intensity of the notion of the nodal vision. It is this special ability of Laney's that makes his relationship with the hologram, Rei Toei, of special interest. To Laney, Rei Toei appears as an incredibly intense node of information, the most intense node he has ever come across; and because of his 'nodal' special ability and the intensity of the node, he finds it almost impossible to look at her during this meeting.

> And now her eyes met his.
>
> He seemed to cross a line. In the very structure of her face, in geometries of underlying bone, lay coded histories of dynastic flight, privation, terrible migrations. (Gibson, 1996: 175)

He can no longer look directly at her, at her face at least, but catches peripheral glimpses and reflections.

> Laney quite clearly saw the light of her face reflect for an instant in the almost circular lenses.
>
> A hologram. Something generated, animated, projected.
>
> Nodal. (Gibson, 1996: 176)
>
> Don't look at the Idoru's face. She is not flesh; she is information. She is the tip of an iceberg, no, an Antarctica, of information. Looking at her face would trigger it again: she was some unthinkable volume of information. She induced the nodal vision in some unprecedented way; she induced it as narrative. (Gibson, 1996: 178)

During the meal, Rei Toei is described in Deleuzian terms. The explicit references come from Kuwayama, Rei Toei's creator who describes her as 'the result of an array of elaborate constructs that we refer to as "desiring machines"'; and he states that this is not in any literal sense 'but please envision aggregates of subjective desire' (Gibson, 1996: 178). The emphasis is given in the text.

When Laney is provided with access to the 'global fan-activity database' he again dons the eyephones and seeks Rez's nodes. It is the organicity of this data that invokes the nodal vision; as the fan club data comes on line 'the barren faces were suddenly translucent, networked depths of postings and commentary revealed there in baffling organic complexity' (Gibson, 1996: 226). In this brief visit into this cyberspace he finds Rei Toei, but this also articulates a difference in the technologies and techniques of 'different' cyberspaces. The text offsets current simulation technologies of cyberspace with one that is holographic and nodal and concerning movement within three dimensional space. The simulation technology is designated as never quite there in terms of both technology and technique (especially narrative) – click here, click there, but never fully delivering what it has promised, or what Laney calls its (potential) 'central marvel'. The

holographic is its 'central marvel', Rei Toei is there, and is able to speak directly to him and with the memory of him from the dinner that has been produced from security-report data (Gibson, 1996: 227).

81 This is where the text begins to specify more of what it means by the nodal. The Idoru's appearance in the data is described as not being a nodal manifestation; rather, she inhabits the data (of Rez and the fan club, in that their union is already becoming), but her data is not yet fully there in its availableness. Laney's intimate one-to-one conversation with her in this sense prohibits his nodal vision. Laney asks her to put him back outside the 'room' they are in, where he can see (Gibson, 1996: 228). That is, back into a representational cyberspace where, as a subject of representation, he can 'see' subjects and objects.

82 The operation of the nodal vision as he inhabits the fan club data is described in intuitive terms, as drifting. He drifts through the data, but relationally, always inhabiting the spaces, and apprehending the movements that constitute the relations between them. The structure of the fan club data coheres around the 'hollow armature of celebrity' (Rez). Celebrity is constituted by this data: postings of personal sightings of Rez, girlfriends, band events, and so on, 'each account illuminated with the importance the event had held for whoever had posted it' (Gibson, 1996: 229). This data is described as human in every detail, but then also not so in its assembly around the 'hollow armature of celebrity'. Laney can see celebrity here, not as the 'substance' produced at, for example, Slitscan but 'as a paradoxical quality inherent in the substance of the world' (Gibson, 1996: 229). The data accumulated by the fans is much greater than anything generated by the band. It is in this sense that the fan club is what the celebrity, as media product, borrows from the world in order to be. That is, the information that is celebrity is the sum of the events of the lives of others. This is what the media, at least in a corporate sense, poaches from the world and claims as its own.

83 It is here that we see nodal vision as a critique of media, but a critique that is enabled by its mode of reading. It can make 'sense' of media in different ways from conventional reading practices. The fantasy and mystique of the marriage, the 'alchemical marriage' as Rez puts it, are here the fantasy and mystique of the media, of all it promises and markets but cannot deliver. The media accordingly becomes a monolithic structure (of discourses) which proceeds remorselessly in the dissimulated fantasy of its self-generation. Nodal vision, then, is the means of an interventionist reading. This has been gestured towards from the beginning by the foregrounding of the problematic of the ethics, at least the need for an ethics, of such reading. To get here, however, to the point and practice of the nodal vision as intervention and critique has required the transformed notions of information and metaphor discussed earlier (or, the becoming-metaphor of information). Nodal vision as constituted in this text deals with information as process, event, metaphor, and is thereby able to apprehend it relationally. This allows it to explore the dissimulation that is media information. That is, what is dissimulated in (corporate) media is what it poaches from the world.

84 But what, then, does the hologram represent in this schema? Laney meets the Idoru directly, in a car with her creator Kuwayama, after her bandwidth has been adjusted so that he can look at her. This time, as he looks into her eyes, he wonders what sort of computing power could create her, and crucially, as 'something that looked back at you' (Gibson, 1996: 237). He remembers what Kuwayama has already said of her in terms of 'desiring machines' and 'aggregates of subjective desire'. Kuwayama explains that the Idoru's videos are not videos as such, but rather, that 'they emerge directly from her ongoing experience of the world. They are her dreams, if you will' (Gibson, 1996: 237).

85 This encounter in the car has been arranged by Kuwayama and Yamazaki who have interests other than the smooth flow of the media machine that surrounds and orchestrates Rez as celebrity. They want Laney to stay with them after his current job; they recognise the practice and value of the nodal vision, and believe that they need it in order to further develop their technology: that is, (the concept of) the Idoru as an ongoing serial experience. Paradoxically, now that she has subjectivity, technological development requires the development of a relational ethics. The relationship between Laney and the Idoru is precisely that they have this becoming-nodal in common. They are the only ones who are able to communicate directly in cyberspace and as subjects in cyberspace in a real-time of cyberspace: that is, not as simply a simulated and

mediated other as self-presence in cyberspace. In this relationship, in cyberspace, we also find something more of the movement and practice, perhaps not quite yet praxis, of nodal vision. We see this relationship in cyberspace after Kuwayama has made the Idoru's data available. Although we do not have textual access to the Idoru's subjectivity, we do have access to Laney's and his experience of the relationship in cyberspace. Laney passes through the data, 'felt himself pass through the core of it, the very center, and out the other side' (Gibson, 1996: 251). But having passed through he could no longer see it, it required a turn, as a re-turn, and to look back from a new angle and distance: "Perspective,' the Idoru said. 'Yamazaki's parallax." (Gibson, 1996: 251)

86 Also paradoxically, it is Laney's nodal vision that enables the union of Rez and the Idoru. Kuwayama and Yamazaki want this union to take place; that is, they want the media machine to continue because it is necessary for their ability to continue to develop her (conceptually, technologically). This is so because her level of development already endows her with subjectivity, and as such can articulate desire – she is a desiring machine, also an aggregate of subjective desire. But this desire is not of her, so to speak; it is appropriated from the data with which she interacts. That is, her continued development requires the continued development of the notion and practice of nodal vision because it functions relationally and intersects with the desires and experiences of the lives which she must poach in order to continue becoming. This has already been evident in her desire for Rez (essentially poached from the fan club members). This desire, however, is also the mediatised fantasy of the impossible desire for a pure and representable virtual.

87 The nature and extent of the Idoru's subjectivity, as a necessary component to desiring, is demonstrated in the coupled notions of intention and projection. Her desire is desire for, intention and projection; she asks Laney to help her (to become what she wants) and believes that one day she will be able to see faces in the clouds as Laney does (one of the descriptions of nodal vision as memories). This is an impossible future-to-come for her, her desire for becoming-human. Nonetheless, what must be said about her subjectivity is that it is, and will always be, constituted in and as information, as an event of information (in-formation). Laney also comes to understand himself, his subjectivity, as information. This is specified differently for him because he has a real worldly body; but in terms of cyberspace, in that his nodal vision always already implies this informational cyberworld, he is in-formation. We see this as he 'passes through': that his subject position in its multiplicity and mobility is constituted as and in relation to information.

88 We have elaborated the concept of textual models, their infrastructures and how these determine and delimit the possibilities of texts and our engagement with them, in order to consider the implications that textual models have for the possibilities and for the future of reading within new media texts that are beginning to overflow the limits of the print-based representational system of texts. We have invoked a critique of representationalism in order to seek a way for a post-print model of textuality not to be overwhelmed by the colonisation of a new model, in particular through the concept of remediation, by the dominant representationalism of the print model. This has involved a consideration of the way our relationships to information have changed in the digital, networked era – that our idea of information has changed and that it has become an event, a 'contradictory and heterogeneous process' (Derrida, 2002: 6).

89 Many of these changes have tended to centre in and around the concept of the interface. Further, there is a dis-ease or anxiety within the interface which tends to be glossed in an overcompensatory fascination and celebratory rhetoric surrounding it. Remediation tends to efface some of these issues, and as has been shown here to subsume them within the twin towers of the 'interface' and the 'experience', and in so doing colonises new forms with the dominant representationalism of preceding print-based forms. Remediation is a good and useful explanation of the continuities between media forms, yet its conservatism can negate new conceptual possibilities. What is particularly problematic is the way it tends to reduce the activity of production that is reading to a simple reception, to 'seeing' – and this activity of reading seems to dissolve in the fascination with the interface. A post-print textuality is not yet given over to representationalism but could become so without intervention by a critical reading practice that takes account of the changed conditions of textuality and their possibilities for reading.

90 Print texts have always dreamt or imag(in)ed their textual worlds, as the product of the engagement in an activity of reading, as we have seen in Idoru, and this engagement is both the

pleasure and productivity of reading. What then will be the dreaming or desire available to and implicit within a post-print model of textuality? Considering the implications of a post-print textual model especially in terms of the question of reading is not simply a projection into an imagined future of textuality but is a means of thinking what is at stake and what are the possibilities emerging already from hybrid models such as immersive virtual reality.

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