**Practices and issues: The English and Literacy classroom**

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Abstract

The article discusses "the content and shape" of the resources for making meaning and the shape of the social environment in which – differently in different places and yet similar in essential respects –the English and literacy classroom is located. At any one time, any aspect of the complex dynamic communicational ensemble might be significant for the learner, so that he has to be constantly attentive to cues as potential prompts. Two questions touch on the notion of "a grammar" in an English and literacy classroom in a fundamental way. One is: what is it that someone-whether teacher or student learner- who is in an English and literacy classroom, needs to know. The other is: what are the social characteristics of those who are in the classroom, and above all, who are the students/ learners? The first question is concerned with what the 'content' of that grammar might be. The second, more profound in its implications, asks whether traditional notions of grammar can continue to be used when the social environment is such that conventions around representation no longer "hold"; when student learners assume to themselves notions of agency which undercut the power-relations and forms of authority on which notions of grammar have traditionally been based.

Key terms: a grammar for meaning, semiotic resources, user-generated content, making of signs, representation, transformation and transduction.

Two questions touch on the notion of "a grammar" in an English and literacy classroom in a fundamental way. One is: what is it that someone-whether teacher or student learner- who is in an English and literacy classroom, needs to know. The other is: what are the social characteristics of those who are in the classroom, and above all, who are the students/ learners? The first question is concerned with what the 'content' of that grammar might be. The second, more profound in its implications, asks whether traditional notions of grammar can continue to be used when the social environment is such that conventions around representation no longer "hold"; when student learners assume to themselves notions of agency which undercut the power-relations and forms of authority on which notions of grammar have traditionally been based.

As far as the first question is concerned, teachers, I assume, have a clear sense of what student learners will need as a resource, as practical means for shaping their social, cultural lives, when they leave this classroom, move on into the next classroom maybe or act in their life outside school; and certainly, when they move into their life beyond the school. I take it that the students will need to have a thoroughly firm "hold" on those resources, coupled with the means for navigating a complex social and semiotic world. I conflate these perspectives into one, namely" what does a person need in their adult social life in order to take a full part in that life ,with a clear

awareness of the effects of their actions?" neither English nor "Literacy" alone can supply that, thought jointly the should provide the semiotic resources for taking a full part in the world of meanings of their social groups, finding their way around the meanings of their society and, most importantly, making their meanings in their world.

As far as the second question goes, what is a tissue is the very notion of "grammar" itself: traditionally seen as an authoritative compendium of entities and practices, a compelling source of rules to be followed, supported by social power- as in evaluations by others with variously serious consequences. Now, in an era of differently distributed power, of agency readily assumed by younger generations-even if that agency is not necessarily acknowledged by others-in the furtherance of their interests, in the era of "user-generated content" and access to the means of potentially global dissemination of that content, the questions are: What actually is 'a grammar'?" and "On whose authority could it be founded?" and "What are the principals for meaning-making?"

In other words, I am concerned here with that which is to be present(ed) and engaged with, "the content and shape" of the resources for making meaning and above all with the shape of the social environment in which – differently in different places and yet similar in essential respects –the English and literacy classroom is located. I assume attend to; the anesthetist might glance at him (in this instance) to draw his attention to something.

At any one time, any aspect of the complex dynamic communicational ensemble might be significant for the learner, so that he has to be constantly attentive to cues as potential prompts. It is his interest as trainee surgeon that turns any one of these-or none-into a prompt for him. It is his decision. Once turned into a prompt, his interest frames it and he selects features from that now specifically framed prompt as the basis for his response.

It is neither difficult nor implausible to substitude "student" for "trainee-surgeon" here. Even now, it is not usual to treat students as responsible for selecting from the teacher's message overall that which they might treat as a prompt and to interpret it as such; it is highly unusual to attribute significant agency to students-as becomes quickly apparent in forms of assessment.

Versions of a very different model of communication have been active in $20^{th}$ century conceptions of communication; and to some extent they still hover around and haunt mainstream conceptions of communication and teaching alike, even though constantly modified. The dominant conception of communication in the latter part of last century was based on Shannom and Weaver's (1947, See Shannon & Weaver,1998) schema of Sender--- >Message --- > Receiver (with very many modifications and variations – feedback loops, and so on), based on electrical engineering. Here the sender (who "encodes" a message in a code shared by sender and receiver) is the active cause of communication. This version received its most telling critique in Rolland Barthes'1968 article "The death of the Author" (Barthes,1977); that insisted on the dominant role of the reader in communication. The Shannon and Weaver model implicitly rested on the stability and (potentially perfect) recoverability of the message; it was the receiver's responsibility to ensure- leaving aside "malfunctions" in the process- that the (meaning of the) message decoded was the same as the (meaning of the) message encoded. The power of sender was not in question.

In Barthes 'conception, the authority for the meaning lay with the reader; the authority of the author was diminished.

Again it is not difficult to recognize affinities of this model with conceptions of teaching (and "learning"),and parallels in the notions of code and grammar. Very  different models of social organization and relations of power are entailed in each of these. Ruling conceptions of communication (and learning)- which still dominate institutional sites oj learning as much as they dominate popular commonsense of both communication and learning- are aligned implicitly, still with the Shannon and Weaver model- which is not to say that other models have not been advocated and used in theories of communication as in those of learning.

In the "operating theatre model of communication, there concerns are in focus. One is social interation and interaction and interchange around meaning, oriented to the processes of constant making and re-making of meaning through the making of sings- simple or complex – in representation. Sign-makers and their agency as social actors are in the foreground and with them the social environments in which they make signs. Signs are made twice: once by the initiator of the message as the ground for the participants'  engagement; and once by the interpreter who turns part of that ground into a prompt.
The second concern is with resources for making meaning-a focus on modes and their affordances. The third deals with conditions and means for disseminating meaning-the media and their facilities. A theory of communication needs to deal with the semiotic work done in all three; and with all the meanings which result. Questions such as "Who does what kind of semiotic work and for whom?" are entailed by this model.

In principle it is neither difficult nor implausible to think of classrooms in this frame. Where the difficulty arises lies in two issues: communication depends on interpretation, so that the power of the interpreter (the student/ meaning-maker/learner) is at the core; and, in this model, communication can only be understood if it is seen as an always complex interaction embedded in social environments which are contradictory, contested, fragmentary: whether between groups or between individuals, coming together from social "locations" which are always distinct in some respects.
The point is: are we prepared to see classrooms in this way? That is, as an environment no longer dominated by power hierarchically organized (and exercised?); with knowledge no longer seen as flowing from that authority; as coherent; knowledge as held, disseminated and "acquired" unproblematically by student learners; in a social environment regard as integrated, homogeneous, coherent?

In this model, the social divergences/ differences between those who interact provide the generative dynamic of communication. Such differences in the classroom may be of generation always intertwined with other social factors: gender as well as cultural differences of many kinds. In the process of interaction, social and semiotic differences are reshaped/transformed in temporary social and semiotic accommodations. As a model of a learning environment, it accords a different position to learners and teachers to any traditional model. Here, meanings are made (rather than acquired) in transformations (and transductions- the shift from one mode to another) as the making of signs. The making of signs (rather than their use) is the making of meaning (rather than its communication). The making of sings and the making of meaning is learning – not now seen as the inert acquisition of concepts. These constant transformations and transductions

constitute semiotic work and are the semiotically and socially productive entirely different site of meaning-making (and learning), that of the operating theatre. I take it to be a representative and in its forms typical instance of an environment of communication; other examples of such sites abound. Taking it as the instance, what model of communication would we come up with?

Frequently the "same" actions become different signs in the respective "other" frame. The multiple structure of an environment of communication, demanding multiple attention from all participants, is likely to be the norm rather than the exception in most situations of communication. Features of gender, class, generation, "culture", professional difference, regionality, are all present here, and in different ways likely to be present in all sites. It means that communication across differences of many kinds is entirely usual and essential.

Communication is multimodal: by speech at times, a spoken comment as instruction or request; by gaze; by actions- passing an instrument, reaching out for an instrument; by touch. At all times communication is a response to a "prompt": a gaze might produce a spoken comment; that leads to an action; looking at the screen by both surgeons produces a guiding touch by one of the other's hand; an outstretched hand is met by an instrument being passed. Communication has happened when a participant's attention has focused on some aspect of the communication; when she or he has taken that to be a massage and has framed aspects of that as a prompt for her or himself. The prompt is interpreted by one of the participants, becoming for them a new inward sign; it ,in turn, leads potentially to further communicational action. The semiotic sequence of attention--> framing- -> interpretation is ceaseless; it involves all the participants, at all times, though differently in each case.

If we frame this environment communicationally, meaning-making is in the centre; if we frame it pedagogically, teaching and learning become the focus. Questions differ depending on the framing:" What meanings are made?" "By whom?" ; or, with a shift in point of view "How does teaching happen?" and, in the same frame thought with another perspective: "How does learning take place?" "What is being learned?" From the learner's perspective, any event may at any one moment need to be attended to: in my example the senior surgeon might give a spoken instruction; the scrub nurse might make a slight movement- or an explicit gesture  - which the assistant/learner ought to that for that to be seriously explored, a pre-requisite is a plausible conception of communication/meaning making/learning and, with that, a conception of students/meaning-makers/learners as agentive in their interests.


A COMMUNICATIONAL FRAMING

What theoretical frame is needed for that ambitious undertaking? For me, the social has to be prior for any such theory to be plausible: it is the generative source of meaning. Clearly, the contemporary world is one in which meanings are made in many modes, each of which specific affordances; and with digital media, many of which provide access and means for dissemination to most. All texts, banal as much as culturally salient, draw on a multiplicity of modes, well beyond the use of speech and writing, as do texts, semiotic phenomena and objects which are accorded high "aesthetic" value socially and culturally. The (formerly central) media of print as are still in use, much as the now dominant digital media of screens: though "generation"- as the

social construction of age – and social domains, such as profession, play a crucial part in differences of practices, dispositions and habits of use. "English" everywhere- whatever the subject may have been and is now in different parts of the Anglophone world – has its place in socially and culturally highly diverse environments. 'Literacy' shares with all modes the task of realizing the meanings of any message.

In that context, the English and literacy classroom is a complex social, cultural, semiotic site, more so – and different – than at any time before. Anglo-phone societies, responding to specific local needs, demands and histories, responding also to distinct ideological and political demands and economic requirements, expect that the "English and literacy" classroom should look in many directions simultaneously and fulfill a diverse range of needs(Kress,1994).

Meaning-making rests on communication, so that sketching an apt theory of communication is the necessary first step in developing a theoretical frame. To get away from deeply entrenched notions around communication (including those deriving from research in classrooms), I use as my example an equally complex yet force of communication. What is socially problematic in the space and site at issue-the classroom in this case- is projected into a public "space", producing temporary recordings of the social and the semiotic state of affairs as "knowledge". In transforming what is at issue in communication, it is shaped differently: meaning is made.


The defining criterion of communication is interpretation: only if there has been interpretation has there been communication. Interpretation is central and so, therefore, is the interpreter. An interpretation is always a mix of aspects of the ground framed as prompt by the interpreter, with resources brought by the interpreter, shaped, jointly, into a new semiotic entity. An interpretation is the result of a series of transformations and transductions, in which aspects of the prompt and aspects of the resources brought by the interpreter come together in a newly made, newly transformed entity.
Interpretation is the defining criterion of communication: only if there has been interpretation, has there been communication.

Such a model does not confirm to the conception of (a) grammar traditionally held.

RESOURCES FOR MAKING MEANING

No environment of communication, of meaning-making and of learning is like any other, and so it is with the comparison of the operating theatre and a classroom, ignoring significant cultural/social/national differences between classrooms. Students bring resources from outside the school into the process at issue in a classroom, while nurses and surgeons do not; the identities of students shaped outside the classroom have large effects in the classrooms, in ways that is not so for nurses and surgeons. Students bring what are taken-for-granted notions into the classroom and these have to be accommodated there. The conditions and relations of power in both sites are different and may remain so more or less despite social changes, or become more pronounced. At the same time, if we wish to understand the principles of meaning-making, the one theory will need to serve both, even if with slight adaptations at the level of the specific environment. The question of what resources are present and may be drawn on and the relations of power which shape interactions in each site are equally relevant in each site. Rules and regularities differ, as

does the degree to which they may be shaped on each occasion, but regularities there are in each case.

The texts and other semiotic phenomena which occur in that abstraction-"the 'English and literacy' classroom" – and which certainly occur in the world beyond that classroom, are multimodal. On a screen they might consist – in the genre of video-game for instance – of instance – of speech; of images, still and/ or moving; of soundtrack and music, of gestures, actions, writing. In the classroom they consist of speech, of images – still or moving, of writing, of gesture, of actions and movement other than gestures, of  sounds as in soundtracks, of 3 D objects and so on, together these form ensembles which, in order to be seen as a text have to exhibit a degree of coherence and which, in any case, is given coherence by the viewer/ reader who engages with it (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen , 2001).

Here arises the first issue in a grammar of meaning-making, in a grammar of multimodal texts: what categories, entities, processes and relations, what terms exist to name these in a "multimodal ensemble"? The terms we have and the terms, therefore, that we tend to use, were produced for grammars of "language", whether of speech or of writing. These terms do not fit the characteristics and requirements of other modes for categories, entities, processes. Put simply, images do not have words do not have verbs or sentences, the have no paragraphs. There is no tense in images, thought there are indications in some way relating to notions of temporality or some related notion. The same is true of music, of soundtrack, of gesture, and so on.

Here is an example. Consider cohesion, the formal means of producing connection and integration and coherence, that quality which gives the beholder/viewer/reader the sense of a semiotic entity which has a unity of meaning, as a projection of a "world" in which things belong together and belong "where they are". In order to establish cohesion and coherence between two entities, we need to be able to link "like" with "like" to show that this belongs with that, that this entity here is a reformulation of that other entity there. But if images do not have words, or phrases, or sentences, how do we establish cohesive links between an image and a "chunk" of writing? How can coherence be achieved?

However, while images do not "have" words, they do have "depictions"; or, as a different example, while they do not have indicators of tense, they do have features which refer to semiotically related notions such as ontological proximity or distance, for instance – of "realism"; of factuality or not; of "pastness"- as "that which is no longer so ". Or, to take yet another example, "emphasis": bolding may indicate emphasis in print while loudness can indicate emphasis in speech; intensity of colour -saturation or the use of colours at the high end of the energy spectrum, may indicate emphasis in image. In other words, high energy is a material feature which can be used as a general semiotic feature of intensity with specific realizations in different modes: depending both on the materiality of the mode (sound, light) and the social uses of that material over time.

The theory to be used, in other words, has to be able to deal with all modes equally well; it needs to be able to work at a level which is abstract enough to provide categories and features of a general kind, which can then be instantiated in ways specific to the materiality of modes. For me that theory is "social semiotics": semiotics as that academic enterprise which is concerned with

meaning in all forms; social in order to emphasize that meaning arises in "the social" and is socially made in social environments by agents with social histories, with the socially made resources of specific cultures .Social semiotics names the practices, agents and categories of meaning-making, while multimodality names the domain of meaning – the socially shaped resources of modes which provide the material, so to speak, for making meanings.

Whether one uses the term "grammar" here or not is, for me, not the most significant   issue; it is a point to be debated. In as much as the etymology of the word "grammar" points to "inscription", the making of a mark, it may be worth preserving the term. In as far as term has had a long association with notions of authority, of social power supporting and maintaining "rules" as enforced regularity of practice, it poses a problem for a theory that attempts to stress the agency of the meaning-makers, which stresses sign-making over sign use, for instance.

In the environment of multimodal communication, writing is one among a number of modes; one means of making meaning among many. Linguistics has no theoretical resources for dealing with modes such as colour, layout image; yet in a multimodal landscape, writing needs to be described within the one theoretical frame together with all other modes. If we are interested in the materiality – the "stuff" – of writing with its cultural regularities and potentials and are interested also in understanding multimodal textual ensembles, the theoretical consequence is the move I am proposing, from a linguistic theory to a social semiotic one. That moves attention from the linguistic interest in form, formal relations and processes to the social semiotic interest in meaning and meaning-making. It is necessary then to point out that the linguistic phenomenon of "writing: is not identical with the social semiotic phenomenon of the mode of writing. Semiotically, mode focuses on all potentials of a mode for making meaning in making signs, the mode of writing being no exception. That permits the continuing use of categories produced in linguistic theories (though now seen semiotically) – such as sentence, word, subject, tense, genres, and so on – embedded now in a focus on all other potentials for making meaning, such as font and size, spacing and bolding, length and features such as the means of framing, sites of display.
Treating writing as mode focuses attention on affordances: a semiotic, not a linguistic issue. It brings attention to matters such as the means of production, handwriting for instance, compared to other means; on aesthetics; on the affordances of (different) script systems and on their explicit and implicit meaning effects. The category of affordances directs attention to meaning, to aesthetics and to affect, to ontological and epistemological effects of representation; in other words, to the full spectrum of meanings.

The contemporary semiotic landscape is charaterized both by multimodal representation and by the ubiquitous presence of the "screens" of digital media. The twofold and linked revolution from the medium of the book and (its centuries-long association with) the mode of writing to the now pre-eminent medium of the screen and the mode of image; from the technology of writing to the mode of image (as well as others), has had and continues to have far-reaching effects on writing (see Kress, 2003). As in all matters where meaning is the issue, the two shifts need to be understood in the environment of the deep changes in the social and economic domain, where the (19$^{th}$ –century Nation-) State has given way in many places in the West to the (neo-liberal) Market as the dominant force in shaping social practices and values. This third, larger, revolution

has weakened, frayed, broken and often simply swept away the formerly firm social forms and practices, the framings of power solidified into "conventions", which had provided the frames for meaning, the naturalized semiotic frames.

At this point it is necessary to say that a grammar for meaning-making will have some – but only some -  similarities with the kinds – and notions – of grammar we have been used to: notions of regularity within flux, rather than of rules authoritatively given and enforced; notions of the agency of the sign-*maker* rather than the idea of the sign-*user*; of *use* shaping the resources of the grammar rather than the categories of the grammar strictly constraining kinds of uses; of categories with application in specific domains rather than categories seen as autonomous from the social. At the same time, this is not a revolution which has swept all that formerly existed before it. In many social domains, in many professions, among older generations, older conceptions and uses of grammar remain; among older generations, older conceptions and uses of grammar remain; among many younger generations and in many social domains, there remains an understanding of these older conceptions and the practices, together with the contemporary. These lead a side-by-side existence, even if with clear social differentiation and evaluation. In the English and literacy classroom that fact needs to be constantly stressed, and uses and practices reflected on and tested.

A "grammar" for meaning making of the kind envisaged -  in a multimodally configured domain; with the media now culturally dominant; and above all with the social givens characterizing most so-called "Western", "post-industrial" or "developed" societies – needs to be a *grammar of communication* in the fullest sense, rather than a grammar of writing or even a grammar of "language" alone.


PROVISIONALITY: RHETORIC AND PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN
 In Anglophone and Western European societies, *stability* – even though that had only ever been relative – has given way to *instability; homogeneity* has given way to often radical *diversity; permanence* has given way to *provisionality*, a condition in which crutial charateristics of the environments of communication can vary from one moment to the next. Attempts to answer the questions "why?" and "why now?" have to look at the many factors, distinct yet everywhere connected, which still are sweeping the world. The short-hand term "globalization" gathers up some of these: conditions which make it usual for the characteristics of one place to be present and active in any other, economically, culturally, technologically. In the contestation of (features of) local practices, forms and traditions with those from outside, both are transformed, in ways dependent on dispositions of power in the local site. At the same time, and as an effect of neo-liberal markets, *choice* has come to be a dominant determinant in the shaping of identity. In place of the nation state and its conception of citizenship and of a nationally conceived economy with its specific positions in a labour forced, identity is now shaped through the action of choice in consumption in the market. The results in any one environment are social, cultural and semiotic instability and *provisionality*.

While a notion of a "grammar", as rule-governed semiotic practice, could be maintained in that former social environment of relative stability, the loss of that olfer social relations, forms, structures, "givens". That has generated far-reaching social changes in all domains of meaning: in

"semiotic *production*" – in the shift from the technologies of print -  with expertise restricted to few – to digital means – with expertise available to (nearly) all with competences and access to contemporary technologies; in the *dissemination* of messages – markedly in the shift from the print media – with authority and control over dissemination and productive participation lodged with few 0 to the (digitally shaped) media of the screen – with productive participation in production and dissemination accessible to vast numbers, as much as in the move from the ("traditional") mass – media to the new sites of "multiplicities of dissemination"; and in *representation* – in the shift from the dominance of the mode of *writing* to the margin in some instances of representation and communication.

Above all, agency as authorship has become widely dispersed as a taken-for-granted cultural "good" for a vast number of people, rather than the rare socially ascribed postion it had been. Grooved and *dependable* conventions no longer exist, not in social interactions nor in communication and not in learning.

These conditions demand a *rhetorical* approach to communication, to meaning making and to learning. That is, in each instance of interaction it is essential to assess the social environment and the social relations which obtain; to adjust forms of communication accordingly, along with dispositions, attention to and engagement in meaning-making and with learning. The competence of clear and detailed analysis of social environments of communication is now becoming a required common place.

Rhetorical analysis provides a description of the social environment in which communication takes place; communicators as *designers* employ sets of *principles* to produce the "shapes" of possible arrangements for implementation in *production* with the use of socially shaped and culturally available resources (Kress, 1994, 2003; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). *Design* accords recognition to the shaping *semiotic work* of individuals in their social lives and builds that recognition into theories of communication and of learning. *Design* embodies a theory of communication as meaning-*making*, based on an assumption for equitable participation in the shaping of the social and semiotic world. By contrast with *competence* – shaped by past requirements and practices and oriented to present expectations – *design* focuses on the *realization* of an individual's present *interest* oriented to *future* effects in their world.

*Design* is prospective, forward-looking, in a multimodally conceived world of meaning characterized by provisionality and marked by diverse, contesting social forces. With the availability of many *modes* and differing *compositional* possibilities, with different *genres* and *discourses* available to *sign-makers/designers* for the realization of rhetorical purposes, the focal issue is to use resources *aptly* in designs for the implementation of rhetorical purposes. The availability of multiple resources offers the possibility for precision in representation: the needs of specific audiences can be met as can the requirements of "what is to be communicated"; both rely on a clear sense of which resources will best serve which purposes. At this point the question of principles of design become crutial: what audience is to be addressed? What are its needs, communicationally and affectively? What is to be communicated for this specific audience? And of course: what resources are available? Equally importantly, what media are available to be used and what media are best to be used here? These questions demand specific answers, about modes to be used, about specific features of the modes – what font types for writing, what colour-schemes and levels of colour-saturation for images – or about potentials of media.

Without a prior rhetorical analysis of the social environment, it is not clear what form representation should take: what *modes* are *apt*, for *this* audience, for *this* purpose; what *genre* aptly captures and projects the social relations at issue – or how, as rhetor/designer I might wish to display these social relations at issue – or how, as rhetor/designer I might wish to display these social relations.

In a (neo-liberal) market-dominated society, *choice* is the ruling category: identity is constructed through choices made. The sum-total of choices made by me defines me as my *style*. Of course, *choice* remains subject to power; hence, in my conception, *style* is *the politics of choice. Style* is subject to evaluation, a further domain where power is active, and so *aesthetics* becomes *the politics of style*.


"ARRANGEMENTS": CONTEMPORARY AND TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSTION

The making of text for an "other" – as individual or group – has to be attentive to *aesthetics* and *style* in the sense just described. Given the condition of provisionality, rhetorical  assessment and aptness of design are crucial. Relevant questions become: "What colour0scheme will capture and reflect how this person sees herself or himself?" "What genre of image, what forms of font, what syntactic forms in what genre of writing, will achieve the *affect* I want to produce?" No aspect of the overall design can be left unattended; what is not designed is just as likely to be interpreted as that which has been designed – though without control by me, the rhetor/designer.

It is revealing to look again at the question of *cohesion* (the formal means of producing connection and integration) and of *coherence* (that quality which gives the beholder/viewer/reader the sense of engaging with a semiotic entity which has a unity of meaning, which is a projection of a "world" in which things belong together and belong "where they are"). If the text has traditionally been a means of providing at least a temporary coherence, in projecting a world which seems unified, it is worth asking what forms of coherence are exemplified in the three example here; or to ask, who is assigned the task, the semiotic work of producing coherence? Coherence of the traditional kind: the devices of traditional grammar are used to achieve this, as well as the means of conventional/traditional forms of text. Lexis, syntax, textual organization (phoricity, for instance), all are used to achieve this – and so is colour. This screen presents itself to us an integrated, coherent text, and projects an integrated and coherent world. In figure 13.4, the single most significant device is colour – not arrangement on the page, not lexis, not syntax.

Coherence – as much as forms of cohesion – have a social meaning. The reader of a coherent written text is asked to imagine her/himself as being part of a coherent social world; that is not the case for the beholder of a semiotic entity which lacks coherence. She or he faces an incoherent, semiotic entity and is faced with the task of imposing coherence on it.

As far as *writing* – though not only writing but all other semiotic resources and arrangements – is concerned, the site as a whole captures and represents a cross-section: from the entirely "traditional" – that is, forms that would have been regarded as unremarkable at any point over the last 60 or 70 years (minor changes apart).

What is design, what does design do? Among the many different ways to think about *design*, I regard *design* as the semiotic implementation of the social accounts provided by the rhetor. In older, "traditional" approaches, with settled and stable social givens and the grammatical forms and assumptions that went with that, the tasks for *rhetoric* and *design* were profoundly different to now: present, yes, but significant only in marginal ways. When social and therefore semiotic conditions are stable, rhetoric largely has the task of re-confirming that which is expected; and design that of implementing conventional forms.

The young people addressed in figure 13.4 are the audience which is also the audience of the school. This out-of-school site - and others quite like it in their style and aesthetics – shape the communicational settled communicational practices and identities of this group. In school, in classrooms other than English and literacy, these young people come across texts arranged on the same modular principles: in Science in Geography, and increasingly, where English uses textbooks in English also (Bezemer & Kress, 2009). The problems the school faces, with its conception of the identity and habitus of its audience, is not difficult to see. This also gives more than a slight hint of the future place of *writing*.

## NAVIGATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND THE ISSUE OF GRAMMAR NOW

Three factors now dominate: the rhetor/designer, resources and principles of design. In a former world of communication, grammar and associated textual conventions suggested what was to be done in *this* situation, *here, now*. The social environment was known- or at least confidently assumed to be known. The question of which mode to use did not arise- with only a slight overstatement, language was assumed to be what there was. Now, the question, first and foremost, is one of resources and choices: of a reliable account of the social environment; a clear sense of who the audience is; what its criterial characteristics are; of my social relations with that audience? From that follow questions about resources available and resources to use: modal and other semiotic resources such as genre, discourse, media. Simultaneously too, there is the question: what resources shall I use for the representation of *this* content, these meanings? Resources and principles are now the focus and choice is the ruling criterion. That is not to say that choice had not always been there: meaning has always been the effect of choice in context, as Halliday (1978) has pointed out, even in social conditions of great constraint. In the era of the neo-liberal market, the ideology of choice is dominant and seen as the ruling principle in social action and practice as much as in its effect in the individual's shaping of her or his identity.

"Le style, c'est l'homme meme," Gustave Flaubert said, showing that the insight and the process is not new. At the time of Flaubert's statement, "l'homme meme", and as we might now say, "la femme meme" too, were tightly integrated into other identity forming processes and structures: of citizen, of worker, of parent, of child, of teacher and student, as of many other social positions. To some extent these structures and processes exist still, though now differently embedded in the ideologies of the neo-liberal market – with the state as its servant. The traditional co-exists with the contemporary, though now in contemporary scales and metrics of evaluation and with marked generational, professional and other differences.

Choice, of course, is set in fields of power, so that the formation of identity in choice is the effect of power as much as the effect of individual interest and need. *Style* is the effect of choices made,

so that *style* can be seen as the effect of the politics of choice. *Styles* in their turn are subject to (e)valuation in the wider social field, also shaped by power, so that *aesthetics* can be seen as the effect of the politics of style. In this approach, both style and aesthetics apply to all semiotic entities, to the results of all semiotic work of *design* and *production*, with no distinction made at the first level between a "high" and a "low" aesthetics: all social semiotic action is subject to evaluation and to the category of aesthetics therefore. This becomes both a central principle in design – what aesthetic characterizes the individual, this group? – and a central heuristic principle: what social site or place does this aesthetic point to, what principles of choice and what dispositions to style and meaning?

In relation to the Children's Poetry web-site, we could track back -  always as a process of hypothesis -  to the choices made and the meanings assumed in the choices made: the rounded irregular shapes of the modules, the genres of illustration, the colour-scheme, the choice of modes and the foregrounding of modes, and so on. The conception of a grammar of meaning-*making* here is entirely different to the conception of a grammar resting on the process of the *realization* of meaning. The meaning-maker –in full awareness of the social environment; of the requirements of the audience in relation to that which is to be communicated; of the affordances of the semiotic resources- *designs* the semiotic entity, whether as text or other semiotic object.

As navigational aids go, all that is missing are two parts of one overarching frame: at one end the consideration of ethics as the politics of evaluation and of value – the evaluation of the effects of my semiotic actions on those who are its likely recipients and interpreters; and at the other end, of rhetoric as the politics of communication. That keeps the approach firmly framed.

The English classroom had been, in many places and in many periods, a space for the consideration of value, both as ethics and as aesthetics, as induction into sensibility, into what was "good" or "best". Traditional grammar had, to a large extent, overlaid and displaced those concerns with a naturalization of social power in assumptions about what was "correct" in language.

So what of a grammar of meaning-*making* in the English and literacy classroom? No doubt that there will again be periods of stability, periods when long periods of stable power have produced new conventions with resources which will by then have become the contemporary commonplace, unremarkable, usual, not seen as complex but seen as what is. But this is not that moment. There cannot, at the moment, be a grammar of the hitherto traditional kind. In its stead the English classroom will need to be the place where conditions and resources for communication are the issue – set in a frame of understanding of difference, diversity, power and ethics – and where solidly founded understandings of these issues can provide its members with the means for interpreting the texts of others as well as making meanings in their interest, apt for the conditions in which they find themselves. Whether we call that a grammar, a new grammar, or whether we treat that as an understanding of agency, resources and principles of design is a lesser issue.


## PS: NAMING, PRINCIPLES AND CATEGORIES

The poetry Archive website presents the characteristic features of the contemporary landscape of

communication – not fully, not in great detail, but in broad outline. There are screens which seem "conventional" enough and there are screens which would cause some upset to some traditionalists in education, politics, the media and no doubt some parents as well. You cannot learn writing of the "traditional" manner from the Children's Website; and there might be a worry that the teachers themselves are addressed in a manner nowhere near conventional enough. But that is the issue: the contemporary period is one in which a vast variety of forms of representation are available and are used. Some of these point to, suggest, former ways of doing things; some are thoroughly located in the present; and some point to a future that no one can fully predict – other than to say with certainty that it will not be in any way like the past. The complex and confusing present is not an anarchic mess, a fact indicated in this website: the young are addressed with one "aesthetic" and the poetry reading public – by and large an educated, sensible, maybe somewhat traditional lot – oriented to the spoken word in poetry and to writing when they buy a volume of poetry – in quite another. Generation, social domain, profession, all have their role in that. It is not an anarchic situation, though it is highly complex.

In this post-script so far, I have used the terms *contemporary, "conventional" and "traditional",* the last two in inverted commas to indicate some distance, some hesitance. I would not now want to have to define "traditional", for instance: after all, which period would I prefer? "Conventional" presents similar problems. Nor have I used "new" or "digital"; and put neither an "e-" nor an "m-" in front of any noun: all of these nouns, morphemes, particles, adjectives bring their problems (Kress & Pacheler, 2007). Yet members of any generation do have a sense about something that it is more of the present and less of the past, what belongs to the era of digitally framed and facilitated communication and, more that that, what comes out of the present – unframed seemingly, compared to the strong social (and semiotic) framings of a not-so-distant past. This makes me interested in a crucial enterprise: the re-naming of the practices of our present, rather than the continuation of the misleading use of terms from the past.

The task, as I suggested, is to begin elucidating principles of design, of composition and of arrangement, as well as the resources available for use in these, as a crucial issue. I am exploring the difference between *principles of design* and *principles of composition. Design*, for me, provides an overarching conception in which my interest interacts with the resources available for me to shape over-arching meaningful conceptions; these express my *interest*, my wish to shape some aspect of the world. Some entity, object, text. Principles of composition then are the means of "implementing", realizing" these conceptions through the use of culturally available shapes, frames and semiotic resources of all kinds.

Contemporary principles of design and of composition differ markedly from those of a not so distant past, enough to attract strong comment and dismissive evaluation: "cutting and pasting", "downloading", "plagiarism" even, are the terms used to signal rejection, unease and incomprehension of these principles. So what are some of these – both principles of design and principles of composition, beyond those mentioned in the body of the chapter?

Were I to contemplate building a new house what might I regard as *principles of design* to discuss with an architect? I might say that I want the house to be light and airy; to be energy neutral in use; to be built from renewable resources; to have clear open spaces; to fit with the building style of the region and of my immediate vicinity; to make it easy for the people in the house to withdraw to "their space yet to have communal spaces that suggest congenial interaction; and to

have these "interpreted" in a contemporary form. These seem to me to be principles of *design*. They express my interest, my "dreams", my conceptions of how I would want to shape the space in which to conduct my life. These are principles which are both an expression of "me" and principles which are wholly socially formed and culturally given.

In many instances these principles would be indistinguishable from *compositional principles*: what size rooms there should be; what specific arrangement of rooms – where the "master" – bedroom might be in relation to the kitchen or the shower and toilet; or the terrace.

Some similar thinking needs to be done in relation to representation and communication. In my representation do I want it to be "traditional" and "conventional" or very much "up with" contemporary forms? Do I want it to be formal or informal, to suggest relations of solidarity or power? Am I attempting to locate myself in a professional domain? Do I want to distance myself generationally from certain groups or seek affinity? Do I wish to seek institutional affinity or not? Which media of dissemination, which site of appearance for my message, will best indicate the meaning I wish to make about myself, the world and my place in that world in relation to others? What aesthetic am I aiming for as a desirable mirror for my audience? And also, what semiotic work do I wish to attribute to my audience? Am I suggesting that they treat my design as authoritative without possibility of change or amendment for the "readers" or do I leave to them the task of designing the page, the screen, the *meaning*?

Quite different *principles of composition* can achieve these *principles of design* – some or all. Do I want a temporal/sequential or a apatial/modular composition? Is the composition to be governed by linearity or modularity? What choices of mode and what modal ensembles/orchestrations will best realize my design? What means of achievement cohesion – in the linearly displayed "text", whether with image foregrounded or with other modes dominant? What role do I give to layout – how integrated should the text or the semiotic entity be or appear? What reading path, if any, shall be indicated? Should it be displayed or enacted/performed? How do I wish to produce salience? Through *intensity* – in whatever mode it might be, or through *placement* of an element, or through *size*?

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