

Prospero's Books: remediating the 'materialities' of the Text

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The new horizons that digital technologies have opened up in long-established notions of textuality are the central concern of a growing area of research. Most notably, as recent scholarship has pointed out, hypertext encourages modes of writing and of reading that are culturally revolutionary by presenting a text as a dispersed field of variants rather than as a falsely unitary entity (Landow 1994).

Against a multifaceted theoretical background, my paper primarily focuses on *Prospero's Books*, Peter Greenaway's 1991 film based on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. By combining the instruments of high-definition digital technologies and the logic of multiple frames, the film explores the status of textuality in the new media age, raising relevant issues as to whether and to what extent the book as a material object will still maintain its symbolic value or simply disappear in a world dominated by screens. (Kress 2003)

The books of Prospero's library, whose pages are continuously read aloud, quoted and visualized in frames that appear on the screen, often embedded one into another, are not only interactive hypertexts which break the bounds of conventional reading: they also investigate the great potentialities of a new 'creative space' which digital tools have freed from the constraints of any physical medium, thus allowing enhanced forms of interaction between word, image, sound and video.

In this sense Greenaway addresses the major issue of the 'materialities' of the text (McGann 1995) in the light of new modes of interaction of different media, which largely respond to Richard Grusin and David Bolter's concept of 'remediation'. (Bolter-Grusin 1999).

References

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