

# **Ulysses Unbound: Examining the Digital (R)evolution of Narrative Context**

*Todd Rohman and Deborah H. Holdstein*

"shoot, wobble, ogle"  
James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Technology and the rhetorical situations it engenders does not provide a first, virginal encounter with things beyond and different from what are usually seen as more traditional genres and the narratives within them. Jay David Bolter has suggested that "[t]he electronic medium now threatens to reverse the attitudes fostered by the [printing] press, by breaking down the barrier between author and reader." Bolter goes on to posit that for online writing, the "act of 'publication' is neither an economic nor a social event" (101). To be sure, Bolter's relatively recent (1991) argument pre-dates the evolving urgency of our year 2000 Internet. The argument is one of its moment, standing on the assumption of technology's somehow being a neutral, free space, untouched by the hierarchical complications of so-called 'real-life,' assumptions only rarely and fully held about any form of online space as the 20<sup>th</sup> century ends. Now, the advertising banner and more subtle, perhaps more insidious forms of economic and political interest splash over every prominent site, altering the purity of reader interaction with even the simplest text or narrative. Now, even the relatively closed list-serv is assumed to have the permutations of hierarchy, dominance, and control that equally permeate 'real life.'

Indeed, Michael Spooner and Kathleen Yancey challenge Bolter's contentions, noting that "the 'publication' he mentions is indeed a social event, and it may be an economic one as well. [. . .] Besides, 'anyone' has always been an author" (268-69). In discussing e-mail as a genre-in-progress, Spooner and Yancey affirm, "We need

**WORKS AND DAYS 33/34,35/36 Vol.17&18, 1999-00**

to think of cyberspace as the commodity that it is" (270). And narrative, much like genre, "raises any number of issues, questions, and contexts—western and non-western, traditional and alternative" (Holdstein, 280). Also like genre, discussions of Internet-related narrative parallel Yancey and Spooner's view that "in our enthusiasm for the (mere) technology, we are *mistaking transition for innovation*" (262, emphasis added).

In 1985, Judith Fetterley argued that "[w]riters who wished to . . . experiment with artistic form might well have chosen to work in genres less formalized, less pretentious, less predetermined, and therefore more open, fluid, and malleable to their uses" (14), suggesting the border-crossing between narrative and genre, inadvertently foreshadowing, perhaps, the interactions between and among texts and cyberspace. Indeed, Fetterley "prefigures any similar attempt to categorize forms of reading and writing on the Internet, and, in [Diane] Freedman's terms, suggests yet another set of antecedents for refiguring genre and women's writing, a set with which we might also view attempts to *genre-ize*, *Netread*, and *Netwrite*" (Holdstein 282). One wonders why otherwise savvy scholars might suggest or believe that virtual narrative somehow offers something socially, ideologically, economically, or discursively unique, especially given the rich contexts of literary history. That the Internet offers traditional print the opportunity for 'intertextuality' merely affirms print. The Internet nonetheless gives an alternative, often interactive type of written authority to reader-based critique and conversation that otherwise remains private or less immediately intertwined with traditional texts themselves. In this light, the Internet offers possibilities to extend and to expand 'traditional' narrative (if such indeed exists), but, as is the critical legacy of the author we will discuss, it is both "a replication of the same game" (Spooner and Yancey 255) and a "new way of representing intellectual life." (254).

James Joyce offers this case in point. *Ulysses*, like other texts of encyclopedic proportions such as David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, or more recently, *Mason & Dixon*, for its countless intrinsic and extrinsic references, self-conscious subversion of conventional narrative form, and sheer magnitude, has for decades raised unique challenges to the process of critical exegesis. The work Joyce imagined "to forge in the smithy of [his] soul," now enjoys "refiring" in the dynamic discourse of the Web (*Portrait*, 253). The expansion of the academy's presence in this medium over the last ten or so years proves to be good timing for a novel of its scale to underscore the sameness and

difference of traditional print and the Web, traditional classrooms, and cyber-learning. Even among serious readers, *Ulysses* remains one of those texts that gets placed somewhere in the five-year-reading plan, or perhaps even the lifetime plan, due to its tenacious resistance to conventional critical approaches and thwarting of reader expectation, qualities usually ascribed as being unique and indigenous to Internet-based narrative and hypertexts. This tenacity suggests that while we can debate the merits of the Web's offering something truly new regarding the reader and narrative, we can nonetheless use Joyce's work to expand both our reading and our teaching in the process of reconciling these various media.

Of late, certain of *Ulysses*' organs have been removed and transplanted into kitchen sink anthologies, most notably, Molly's concluding monologue, her elated Yes! somehow ringing hollow at the end of such a truncated journey. Publication cost and competition, the ongoing redefinition of canonical texts, along with the demand for ever more inclusive readers, make such cuts and abridgments now routine, exacerbating already contentious issues of narrative regarding Joyce, for instance. James Shapiro discusses this trend in a recent edition of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, citing falling book orders for literary works which exceed 350 pages: given the way that books are taught in today's college classrooms, in courses that meet for an hour or so a few times a week for 15 weeks, "it has become increasingly difficult to assign long and complex works of literature" (Shapiro). He argues that the implications of these and other constraints may spell doom for important works of imposing length, noting that "in America today, if a book is not taught, it's unlikely to remain in the canon for long." A partial answer to this dilemma may be to open more spaces for lively, text-centered, Web-based interaction that extend beyond the confines of the actual classroom, extensions of discussion and class time that permit time for that embarrassment of riches we call the expanded canon and that give us additional time and media with which to expand discussion of narrative and its critiques.

The millennial shift, to be recognized by future historians as the dawning of the digital revolution, nonetheless signals an epistemological fracture in the way we and future generations track down information, communicate, and assemble meaning. Whatever one thinks of the Web's presence in the Academy, or that of the Academy in the Web, and what it may mean for the future of scholarship, we have undeniably accepted the positive effects of digital communication on the way we write letters, receive up-to-the-minute news, manage our personal finances, plan our weekend

excursions, play the market, or find the nearest place for good tapas. For many of these information sources, such as newspapers, the transition from print media to hypermedia seems a logical progression (newspapers, after all, have always been about expediency). But what of literature? How might digital media inform, transform—or affirm—works bearing a substantial history of critical inquiry? We may begin by considering the unique place held by *Ulysses*, which commands an ever growing Web presence. By considering some aspects of the novel's narrative structure and critical reception, one can discover how it has anticipated its latest career on the Web. In doing so, we may learn that hypermedia environments can facilitate, and do not necessarily threaten, a student's capacity for conducting serious (more traditional forms of) research or engaging in dynamic interaction in respect to literature. Indeed, beneath the Internet's seemingly endless layers of advertising we may find less of our desire for wholly new forms of narrative and more potential for scholarly and pedagogical undertaking.

When we note textual wanderings, narrative fragmentation, and uncertainty, we speak not of the Internet but of Joyce's 'novel,' the death-knell to modernist formalism: "Wandering Rocks" will be our point of entry. The episode represents the novel's construction as a whole, but connects its multiple references and allusions to the world both within and beyond its pages. Not unlike the unique qualities attributed to online narrative, readers must, throughout its multiple, interpolated sections, negotiate numerous instances of mistaken identity, textual ruses, feints and dodges, to access the 'real' sequence of narrative events. The gradually more difficult task of prioritizing sequential information in this section subverts the very process of imposing a scale of importance on what is, after all, a fiction. The challenge "Wandering Rocks" presents to the reader lies in a myriad of details that must be read, of course, in linear fashion, while the narrative construction of the episode mitigates against exactly such an effort.

One of the most curious aspects of the episode is its break from the novel's earlier stylistic devices. As is well known, Joyce renders much of his twentieth-century *Odyssey* through use of the 'initial style' or interior monologue of his three principals, Leopold and Molly Bloom, and Stephen Dedalus. This technique, excluding the batch of headlines comprising "Aeolus," predominates most of the novel's first half; so despite the unconventionality of its construction (each episode displays some unique *technical* device, metonymically related to the whole), even early readers quickly recognized and adapted to Joyce's original hyper-realistic render-

ing of June 16, 1904. This style, which, according to Stuart Gilbert, allows “for the rapid and vigorous presentation of the flow of those secret and autonomous thoughts which seem to shape themselves beyond the pale of consciousness and to proceed in order of time coherent speech,” demands an active discernment between the river of each character’s fleeting, interior thoughts, and their ‘actual’ spoken words (14). Further, these inner/outer voices perform against an urban backdrop of Dickensian—well, Joycean—richness.

In *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*, Karen Lawrence focuses on some of the chapter’s consistent elements as a way of interpreting information which may, at first hand, seem largely fragmented and incidental. She suggests that “time and space are the unifiers in the universe of the chapter: the characters moving through Dublin are related by coincidence in time and proximity in space” (84). It is at this point in the novel that, in her view, “we witness the breakdown of the initial style and a departure from the novelistic form of the book’s first half” (80). One could say that the readerly act of discernment is still necessary as in the early chapters, but both ‘figure’ and ‘ground’ of the later chapters have changed. When Bloom, early in “Calypso,” for example, attempts to explain the concept of “metempsychosis” to Molly, his thoughts wander from the topic at hand to the events of the day: “That we live after death. Our souls. That a man’s soul after he dies. Dignam’s soul . . .” (*Ulysses* 64). As these partial phrases indicate, we find Bloom in the very act of formulating a response to Molly, trying to fashion a ready definition for her, without such orienting information such as “Bloom considered,” or “Bloom reflected.” While analyzing the book Molly has handed to him, his thoughts return briefly to the recent death of Paddy Dignam, then finally to more mundane matters: “Must get that Capel street library book renewed . . .” (64.). Bloom’s disjunctive thought and asides become essential to our understanding of him, and, as we will see, more recent critics have been drawn to the latter half of *Ulysses* for similar reason, attributed to the disjunctures of narrative.

When we confront “Wandering Rocks,” the challenge lies not in simply unifying the thoughts, activities, and dialogue of single characters, but in disentangling an amalgam of events surrounding the Viceroy’s progression through the streets of Dublin. Later critics, such as Brian McHale, also consider the relevance of this narrative fault-line, though attributing other significance to the rift. In his discussion of what ‘is novel’ and ‘is not novel’ in *Constructing Postmodernism*, he characterizes the trends in criticism surround-

ing *Ulysses* and how they have shifted over the years. McHale suggests that “we find an almost exactly complimentary distribution of emphases: where the emphasis for the earlier critics falls on the first half of the text, for more recent critics it falls on the second half” (43). He summarizes briefly by stating that “earlier critics sought in *Ulysses* a ‘normal’ modernist poetics, a poetics that could be seen to have evolved from the early-modernist phase represented by *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and they found it in the chapters of the first half” (44).

As we compare the work of early and recent critics, what emerges is the importance of the fissure separating *Ulysses*’ two halves, which, depending on a critic’s cultural moment, determines which of the two is regarded as the ‘authentic’ text. Recent studies, such as that conducted by Lawrence, support this notion; her work describes more broadly Joyce’s narrative techniques in both his earlier work and the early chapters of *Ulysses*, but she reserves her more intensive analysis of narrative construction for “Aeolus” and the more disjunctive chapters that follow. McHale argues that *Ulysses* “pushes the modernist poetics . . . to a point of excess where it topples over into something else, and paradoxically undermines that modernist poetics” (48). To consider again the challenging construction of the “Wandering Rocks” episode, we can see that the indeterminacy of fictive lies in the narrative representation of what McHale terms “mobile consciousness” and “mobile world” (48). If earlier chapters present fluid interior thought against a stable narrative world, then later chapters can be said to exhibit an unsettling narrative environment where both fictive consciousness and fictive world become destabilized, a destabilization of the sort frequently attributed to online hypertexts and other narratives. This interplay of figure and ground creates an ambivalence of meaning for which earlier critics did not have a language, a region of the “something else” suggested by McHale, a region of the “something else” in what are often suggested to be the uniquely new possibilities for narrative and reading in cyberspace.

More recently, these especially ‘difficult’ chapters of *Ulysses* are considered from the perspective of the postmodern. Since the imposition of hierarchy, categorization, and textual labeling is one of the practices postmodernism seeks to undermine (another interesting reflection of similar, if unrealistic, desires as focused on the Internet), many in this critical camp would decry the use of a postmodern ‘users’ guide.’ Risking implication in such a totalizing gesture, Ihab Hassan’s study, “Representing the Postmodern,” offers a

table of characteristics which help to distinguish between features of modernism and postmodernism. A portion of this follows, the categories for 'postmodernism' remarkably parallel to early, naïve hopes for cyber narrative and cyberspace in general:

<b>Modernism</b>	<b>Postmodernism</b>
Form	Antiform
Purpose	Play
Hierarchy	Anarchy
Art Object/Finished Work	Process/Performance
Distance	Participation
Centering	Dispersion
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext
Selection	Combination
Narrative	Anti-narrative

This chart is a selected portion of one found in Ihab Hassan's "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," originally in *The Postmodern Turn*, 84-96.

Hassan is careful to note that the preceding traits are best described as tendencies rather than sharply defined categories. As the chart draws on a variety of fields in compiling the table, including "rhetoric, linguistics, literary theory, philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, political science, [and] even theology . . . , inversions and exceptions, in both modernism and postmodernism, abound" (281). Although variation and exchange, interplay and reversal mark this list of features, a quick scan also reveals which of the two 'tendencies' above aligns itself with *Ulysses'* later sections, as well as with digital culture. If one considers participation and play to be evidence of a postmodern tendency, *Ulysses* self-consciously performs as a text embracing the binary, oppositional features of the modern and postmodern, inviting readers to impose meaning along the way. Its dialectic struggle between text vs. not text, inside vs. outside, and figure vs. ground creates a novel at war with itself, a dense collusion of subordinate skirmishes and narrative boundary disputes. Any serious attempt to epitomize 'what happens' in *Ulysses* from scene, to episode, to chapter, to novel opens an endless array of narrative contingencies, of links, of passages that make returning to a narrative 'home' seem impossible. Indeed, 'what happens' in the *Ulysses* 'narrative' is not unlike the "genre of chaos" Spooner and Yancey attribute to the texts of the Internet, their sense that now, as with forms of traditional print, "written forms . . . come from and point to many directions at once." (272-73)

In a lecture delivered at the Ninth International Joyce Symposium in 1984, Jacques Derrida gave a performative illustration of the

text's narrative ambivalence. His talk, which ostensibly focused on the countless occurrences of the word 'yes' in *Ulysses*, weaves a narrative which conflates conceptions of internal and external narrative space while discussing the same phenomenon in the text itself. After his initial use of the word, Derrida confounds his listeners' interpretive act—as does James Sosnoski regarding e-mail in his response to Spooner and Yancey—by suggesting the coexistence of two *yeses* or *ouis*: “In my opening,” Derrida remarks, “you could not decide, and you are still incapable of deciding, if I was saying *oui* to you or if I was quoting” (256). Here, he not only points out the ambiguous nature of language, but performs, in a parody of Joyce's project, a blurring of the boundaries between the stated subject of his discussion and a series of indirectly or tangentially connected anecdotes about his own personal odyssey through the streets of Tokyo. By doing so, he offers one possible model for engaging with *Ulysses*, a way to avoid the critical trap of sifting through the novel's contents in the hope of discovering its essential or official narrative, but instead exploring the surfaces of its dynamic narrative tensions. Derrida raises a question that we might seize as central to the future reception of the novel in light of the digital age: “So where are we going with the union of this Joycean community? What will become of it as his pace of accumulation and commemoration in one or two centuries, taking into account new technologies for archiving and storing information?” (285). His speculation draws attention to the interesting development of a simultaneous unification and dispersal of Joycean criticism. On one hand, critical interest from the ‘core group’ of Joycean scholars (such as those represented at the symposium) is as strong as ever, but on the other, the globalization of the text within the electronic environment begins to efface the distinction between ‘official’ voices of an academic literati and a mass readership who have recently acquired the opportunity for Web-based publishing. Never has there been a more integrated network of Joycean critical debate, and never has such a debate been so immediately polyform and diverse.

In 1985, when browsing was an activity one conducted only in retail shops, Derrida humorously speculates about a marriage of technology and text which could dominate the future of Joycean scholarship: “Supposing a department of Joycean studies decides . . . to institute a ‘program,’ the first phase of which would consist of putting in table form a typology of all the *yeses* in *Ulysses*, before moving on to *yeses* in *Finnegans Wake*. The chairperson agrees . . . to buy the nth generation computer that would be up to the task”



(305). Despite the obvious hyperbole, Derrida's prescient talk forecasts *Ulysses*' latest incarnation, though the reality of the text's presence on the Web extends beyond local circles of Joycean scholars, beyond the walls of any academic department, and yet remains intractably beholden to Joyce's 'traditional' anti-narrative itself.

While the scenario Derrida paints functions as a cautionary tale—one that contends that *Ulysses* can no more be accessed by means of a computer program than that of any other human feat of aesthetic expression—Derrida accurately anticipates what one might choose to call a textual experience of the 'third kind,' after modernism, and after postmodernism (the latter position bearing, of course, no convenient appellation). While *Ulysses* still generates controversy and discussion in terms of modernist or postmodernist classification (Hassan's chart illustrates how the narrative lines of *Ulysses* run from one conceptual pole to the next), such narrative disorderliness has virtually guaranteed the novel's latest position, and most current means of critical reception, within the hybrid, many-voiced regions of virtual space.

As do the inconsistencies of the Internet, the inherent doubleness of the novel persists, as do questions of its reliance upon thousands of literary, historical, religious and political references. The novel, even considering its multiple, self-referential construction, has never functioned in a vacuum; it has always been Web-like, linked, reader-dependent, an instrument that, like the computer and the Internet, also raises issues of accessibility. As a text that accumulates meaning as it links to sources external to itself, *Ulysses* lends itself to this new life among the countless developing discourse communities on the Web. In the virtual light of this medium, we are once again forced to test our notions of narrative and critical inclusiveness in dynamic new ways, even further than Joyce still demands of us through this non-traditional text. Through cyberspace, but not unlike its presence in print, *Ulysses* begins *anew* to get fuzzy at its boundaries.

In a core course for English majors that one of us teaches as a classroom/Internet hybrid, we have observed this: whether students work in small groups or on the Web, the critical challenge of addressing this formidable work remains the same. It is one that does not lend itself to ready interpretation, sometimes even under concentrated close reading; if anything, the Web extends and enhances these complexities. These days, Joyce proves not only an education about political and religious strife in a nation under colonial rule (the conflicts themselves studies in avoiding the sim-

plified, bifurcated version of the region's violence as represented in American news bytes: Catholic against Protestant, Irish against English, Reformers against Conservatives), but also, of course and as always, about readers and reading, narrative, and literary history. These issues are anything but easily defined, and the related arguments and contexts extend beyond the scope of the classroom experience; but students are struck by the uniqueness of an anti-narrative from the early twentieth century, silenced (momentarily) to realize that disjunctive narrative did not begin with the Internet, just as the filmed musical did not begin with MTV.

For these and many reasons, it has been particularly productive to implement the virtual classroom as a complement to a traditional classroom in a course on James Joyce. Although it seems with each passing month the Web has more to offer in terms of multimedia experience, the format it currently best handles is text. Therefore, as a new venue for well-composed critical responses, reaction journals, and rhetorical exploration, a shift from hard copy to Web-based presentation yields a variety of results. Classroom discussion of more traditional journal-based writing, the goal of which, of course, is to spur critical debate, publicly credit original insight, and raise the performance bar for the group by highlighting the work of uniquely invested students, shifts smoothly into a Web-based model, creating a number interesting possibilities not available to the traditional classroom experience.

For example, though most students take great care in submitting relevant (paper-based) reaction journal entries, many of which are typically shared with the class at large, the practice, for the student, is still basically a private one. Since the audience for these submissions is, for the most part, just the instructor, these writings do not generate a vibrant, active text-based discourse.

This course on Joyce uses one forum for each week's reading and requires responses of specified length for each. The greatest benefit of this WebCT-based<sup>1</sup> format is that students begin to see their writing as not simply an isolated activity, but also as public narrative performance. The ambiguities, obscure references, and foregrounded stylistics of *Ulysses* has found a perfect, complementary enactment in this text-based, virtual classroom. Students invest themselves thoroughly in their responses, since they know that their work will be available and analyzed immediately in a public, though restricted, domain. In this environment, the time constraints of the classroom disappear, along with the tendency of classroom interaction to privilege more assertive personality types or students whose ideas need less time to gestate, as much early

Forum	Unread	Total
All	1	246
1.a Dubliners: July 6	0	23
1.b Dubliners: July 8	0	30
2.a Portrait: July 13, ch. 1-3	1	23
2.b Portrait: July 15, ch. 4-5	0	19
3.a Ulysses: July 20, ch. 1-3	0	27
3.b Ulysses: July 22, ch. 4-6	0	15
3.c Ulysses: July 27, ch. 7-9	0	15
3.d Ulysses: August 3, ch. 10-12	0	18
3.e Ulysses: August 10, ch. 13-15	0	14
3.f Ulysses August 12, ch. 16-18	0	14
4. Finnegans Wake: August 17, Selections	0	17
Assorted Paper Topics	0	0
Main	0	31
Notes	0	0

The course-building application for the Internet courses, WebCT, makes course management exceptionally easy, particularly when combined with a minimal amount of HTML know-how. By adjusting a few settings, and personalizing a number of features, one can create threaded discussion on any topic one wishes.

research in technology and the humanities has demonstrated. This domain allows students to reflect and polish their responses before contributing, participation that, for some, may be a source of classroom trepidation. Although a course may officially meet only twice a week, the door of the online classroom is of course always open, with new questions, speculations, and reactions entering at all hours, and at each student's convenience. Given the link between work in class, the students' reading, and online discussions, a wealth of topics generated in the virtual classroom not surprisingly find their way into the actual classroom. Students frequently address classmates' points they had been reading the night before, or right before class in the computer lab. As the sheer size of *Ulysses* and its encyclopedic references far exceed the time constraints of the classroom, the online course creates an arena where discussion can flourish, with the implicit lesson to students that speculation on challenging literature does not have to occur only in the context of class or campus experience. And, of course, the Web itself provides additional text-based resources for this community of readers and writers to read with and against, all of which is centered by Joyce's work itself.

In his *A Guide to Online Education*, Greg Kearsley suggests that apprehension among educators about online instruction stems

from the assumption that distant access results in an alienating course experience:

People who have little or no experience with online learning or teaching tend to harbor some misconceptions (which are quickly cleared up after actual participation in online classes). The most common misconception is that online classes will be fairly sterile and impersonal. But once a person starts to interact with other group members, they quickly discover that an online learning environment can be very rich and very personal. Participants often establish online friendships which outlast the particular class. Furthermore, people typically find that they are drawn into the subject matter of the class much more deeply than in a traditional course because of the discussions they get involved in.

In the face of so much apparently alienating technology, it's heartening that the digital revolution may continue to revolutionize the very concept of the classroom, not as solely a brick and mortar defined space, but as a space for the interplay of ideas. While one real advantage of Internet discussion groups might appear to be interaction stripped of affiliations and identifying characteristics which can generate preconceptions about the writer or speaker, others warn that such masking creates an "impossible ideological neutral," and that students must be able to confront and respectfully deal with difference. (Holdstein, "A Politics" 30) This in-class and virtual 'link' assures that students continue to "see the face of the other," Emmanuel Levinas' assurance that by meeting face-to-face, "it is precisely this capacity to recognize fully the sanctity of the other that generates any sense of caring and ethical obligation," to our minds the hallmark of the student-centered enterprise. (Lerner 214) For now, and for teaching, then, the digital 'revolution' enhances, but does not replace the face-to-face setting that demands personal accountability (among other things), and reconciling the powerful forces of technology with the strengths of the so-called traditional classroom.

Looking back at the "Wandering Rocks" episode of *Ulysses* illustrates that the process of orienting oneself in a new textual environment may be at once confusing and frustrating. However, not unlike cyberspace, it also opens a variety of possibilities for readerly interaction. In one of the episode's many sub-sections, readers confront the following passage, without ready or helpful context:

The disk shot down the groove, wobbled a while,  
ceased and ogled them: six. (229).

Later in the episode, readers discover that the earlier interpolated narrative teaser describes the action of Tom Rochford's unique gadget, a machine to help latecomers find their bearings in that evening's vaudeville program. Since the rapid variety of dance or music recitals makes it difficult to know which performance is in progress when one enters mid-show (not uncommon, because these turn-of-the-century vaudevilles sometimes ran for hours) Tom attempts to lend some order to the proceedings with his simple invention. The machine, displaying the message "Turn Now On" near an opening to display the number-bearing disk, informs latecomers about which act or 'turn' is currently being performed on stage. One might say that the reader who attempts to 'order' the information in this scene, confronted by the same lack of context, repeats the confusion of members of the stage show audience who are lost without a program. Readers similarly search for clues to lend relevance and coherence to Joyce's narrative performance as they follow along. Introduced only to aspects of the machine's function, "shoot, wobble, ogle," and not its design or purpose, readers are left wondering, confused. Joyce's deployment of fragmented narrative components still insures its permanent position at the center of critical debate and, considering *Ulysses'* growing presence on the Web, searchable indexes and extra-textual promise to further open the field of exegetical study<sup>2</sup>. The text of the Web, and it is important to consider it as just that—one single, global, integrated text—similarly conceals the engines of its generation, and similarly offers no program or map to guide one toward information that is relevant or credible. Any random search uncovers thousands of references, and, at least with current search engines (and even were they to somehow become more complete), these are not ranked by relevance—nor should they be. In terms of one's own scholarly pursuit or the work of one's students, this fact is either liberating or a threat to the way in which we assemble knowledge and construct meaning. Having to measure, to choose, to judge which information is critically essential and which is not, affirms that the responsibility for critical judgment is with the reader and critic, not with the creator of the search engine. Derrida's contention, "when it comes to Joyce, what is an expert?" (265) is exactly what we as readers and writers must question of the Web's global text, just as we must question of more familiar (less familiar?) print-based narratives and anti-narratives.

It intrigues our students that well before the development of the Internet, *Ulysses* was regarded critically as an anti-narrative, a text integrated into a multilingual, multinational pool of metanarrative, simultaneously exploring the life of one day, but comprehensively addressing virtually every aspect of human society. The critical apparatus that assists, imposes, or enhances the construction of its meaning has evolved as well. The text of *Ulysses* may have at last found a context in cyberspace that potentially complements rather than conflicts with the hybridity of its narrative design. The core, the source for this discovery, however, remains the novel itself. Resulting from the tsunami of evolving spectacle we might call the Internet, we must still monitor our ability to filter information that is important to us—the careful, critical-analytical process of converting useless raw data into knowledge. As the case of James Joyce teaches us and our students, narrative and its relationship to the Internet is new and not new, self-contained and everywhere, traditional and non-traditional. It is this mix of so-called ‘tradition’ and its incarnations as that which is allegedly new that will provide us and our students with ongoing texts for analysis and critique, for reminders of what is truly new and what has truly evolved from unique if established and wide-ranging forms and contexts. *Ulysses* confronts with just such an implicit and demanding task for reading, writing, teaching, and learning.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Through visiting the WebCT homepage, at <http://www.webct.com/>, one may design a sample course online to see if the application meets one’s instructional needs. In addition to being a fine vehicle for discussion threads and a gateway to other Web resources, the application offers many tools for designing quizzes, posting exams, and developing study modules.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Master’s student Laura M. Cook developed an interactive version of *Ulysses*’ “Sirens” episode, where one may follow the links from the overture section heading the episode to other sections within the text. Her work can be found at <http://www2.shore.net/~laura/thesis/home.htm>. More comprehensive, fully searchable editions of both *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* can be found at <http://www.trentu.ca/jjoyce/fw.htm>. The latter site is owned and operated by Tim Szeliga.

## Works Cited

- Bolter, Jay David. *Writing Space*. Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1991.
- Derrida, Jacques. "Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce." *Acts of Literature*. Ed. Derek Attridge. Trans. Tina Kendall. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Gilbert, Stuart. *James Joyce's Ulysses*. New York: Vintage, 1955.
- Fetterley, Judith. *Provisions*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.
- Hassan, Ihab. "Representing the Postmodern." *A Postmodern Reader*. Ed. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon. New York: SUNY, 1993. 273-286.
- . "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism." *The Postmodern Turn*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1987. 84-96.
- Holdstein, Deborah H. "A Politics of Composition and Technology: Institutions and the Hazards of Making New." *Writing Program Administration*. 20.1/2 (1996): 19-31.
- . "Power, Genre, and Technology." *CCC*. 47.2 (1996): 279-284.
- Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 1916. New York: Penguin, 1976.
- . *Ulysses*. 1934. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Kearsley, Greg. *A Guide to Online Education*. 1 July. 1997. 13 Sep. 1999 <<http://gwis.circ.gwu.edu/~etl/online.html>>.
- Lawrence, Karen. *The Odyssey of Style in Ulysses*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981.
- Lerner, Michael. *The Politics of Meaning: Restoring Hope and Possibility in An Age of Cynicism*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1996.
- McHale, Brian. *Constructing Postmodernism*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Shapiro, James. "When Brevity rules the Syllabus, 'Ulysses' is Lost." *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 12 Feb. 1999. 13 Sep. 1999 <<http://www.chronicle.com>>.
- Spooner, Michael, and Kathleen Yancey. "Postings on a Genre of E-Mail." *CCC*. 47.2 (1996): 252-278.

# IV

## **Texts of Hyper-Possibility**

*Re-Visioning Hypertext*