

**Bill Wolff**

**Core 2: Research Methods for Writers, Spring 2010**

**Sample Annotated Bibliography**

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Note: this annotated bibliography was not created with the same source requirements as in our assignment.

Aarseth, Espen J. (1997). *Cybertext: Perspectives on ergodic literature*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Aarseth argues that digital technologies make possible now new forms of cultural expression that are similar to traditional literature, but are also different in fundamental ways. He posits an approach to literature that he calls “ergodic,” from the Greek words ‘work’ and ‘path’. The author argues that new forms of cultural expression such as hypertexts, and Multi-User Domains, which are the text-based precursors to today’s virtual worlds, should be deconstructed as “texts” not in the traditional sense, like literature, but in way that respects their similarities and differences to traditional literature. Some of Aarseth’s examples are slightly dated, but his approach, which seeks to draw parallels between static and digital texts (without arguing that a text’s “digitality” is its central difference) have been very important to scholars of games since this book’s publication in 1997. I hope to at least use this work as part of the literature review, and possibly use it in conjunction with Bogost’s text below to explain the approach I want to take when deconstructing games. This text takes a fairly rigorous, comparative approach to literary theory that I think will help provide that all-important “scholarly heft” to a discussion that may at first appear to lack much weight.

Bogost, I. (2008). *Unit operations: An approach to videogame criticism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bogost develops a framework for interpreting videogames by examining both their artistic and technical influences. Bogost shows how investigating the dual nature of games-- as both unique, interactive entities unto themselves as well as forms informed by non-interactive ones-- can yield to a more nuanced appreciation and understanding of all media forms. Bogost’s use of the term “unit operations,” which he defines as sets of “interlocking modes of meaning-making,” is an attempt to examine videogames and other forms of media on their own terms appears to provide a legitimate basis for comparative research. I intend to study some of the rhetorical devices used in games, and possibly compare them to those employed in other mediums. In order to do this effectively, it may be wise to implement, or at least consult, a framework that will allow me view both types of artifacts within their specific contexts. Bogost’s work has been well-received, and his familiarity with literary theory and software development lend his work a certain credibility that a practitioner of a more parochial field may not necessarily enjoy. I hope to use these theories as the bedrock of my thesis- as a rigorous, comparative approach to videogame criticism that would be equally valid for a game, a book, movie, or a website.

Davidson, C.N., and Goldberg, D.T. (2009) *The future of learning institutions in a digital age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

This book, published as part of a series by the MIT Press in conjunction with the

MacArthur Foundation, is part of a series of the most recent scholarship that aims to examine the role of new information technologies on educational and social life. This volume is primarily interested in seeing how technology, particularly the Internet, can be leveraged to make learning more participatory in classroom settings. Davidson and Golberg believe that the Internet's hierarchical system in which information is distributed, and its status as an inherently collaborative system, provide us with a useful model for revising today's classrooms. The authors lay out ten principles to keep in mind when implementing Internet technologies in the classroom. Then they discuss past pedagogical practices that may need revision in light of recent research. I am interested in how new media technologies can-- and do-- augment or revise pedagogical practice. This book should help to reinforce the importance of new media technology for educational purposes.

Hayles, N.K. (2008). *Electronic literature: New horizons for the literary*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

This book is one of the most up-to-date and thorough treatments of electronic literature around. It serves as an introduction to the electronic literature field. It then proposes an approach to analyzing electronic literature that sees the human and the machine as entities that must be accounted for in any explanation of a digital text. This book can, in a way, bridge the gap between interpreting digital literature and digital games. The book is critically informed, and also technically informed. Hayles' book will certainly be in my literature review, to explain the growing importance of computers on the study of literature. I may explore the text in more depth; I haven't decided yet.

Kahne, J., Middaugh, E., and Evans, C. (2009). *The civic potential of videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

This text was also published in conjunction with the MacArthur Foundation. Based on a thorough ethnographic study of 12-17 year-olds, the authors examine the place that videogames occupy in the lives of young people. The authors examine the communal aspect of online games, and the close ties that young people develop through this shared experience. The authors argue that games have the ability to mobilize people via their ability to bring a community of often disparate people together. This text, at the very least, provides some information about how wide-spread videogame use is for young people today. I may only use this book as a reference. It will also serve to bridge the gap between the media literacy literature and the games literature.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. New York: Routledge.

Kress argues in this book that new media technologies, seen on a screen, are drastically reshaping the competencies people need today to be "literate." Kress goes into great detail discussing how society makes meaning out of a particular sign, then argues that technologies and peoples' uses of them are reshaping how we make meaning of signs. Kress traces the development of print culture to screen culture. The primary difference between print culture and screen culture is that the former is much more dependent on images. Therefore, Kress argues, we must become better readers of the images that we will surely come across as new media technologies permeate our cultures. I plan on using this book to illustrate the shift from print culture to visual culture. There are many ideas

that Kress illustrates about linguistics and meaning-making that I think relate well to games. Games are, after all, a mode of representation that derives much of their value from peoples' ability to understand what they are visually depicting.

Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. New York: Routledge.

Kress and van Leeuwen argue that images, by virtue of their status as socially constructed signs, carry a great deal of cultural currency. The authors compare the significance of alphabetic language to non-alphabetic, image-based signs. Because of abundance of socially generated signs that presently exist, it is quickly becoming imperative that we become sophisticated "readers" of these signs. This work focuses on the types of images we see all the time-- street signs, advertisements, news photographs, and the Internet. The authors posit a systematic approach to dissecting signs that takes into account culture and modality. This text will fit in with the other that discuss the importance of "reading" images.

Lakoff, G., and Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* centers around how language is not neutral; it is constructed and it can be used for many purposes. The text explains how metaphors are so well-used and well-worn that it is at times so difficult to see that they become almost transparent. Lakoff and Johnson explain the importance of looking at texts of every kind critically. However, the authors are quick to point out that while metaphors may indicate known or unknown biases, this is not necessarily a bad thing, as metaphors are helpful in making the world (and the word, for that matter), understandable and relatable to its audience. It is natural for people to equate something they do not understand to something they do. I will attempt to link the lessons presented in the text, which center primarily on written and spoken discourse, to computational artifacts. One of the similarities between written and visual media is their shared use of metaphors. In written discourse, the author must use abstracted metaphors to get his or her point across. Games are different- they can simulate metaphors. This facet of the videogame medium makes it at once similar and different to print-based media. I hope to use this text to explain the importance of metaphor in print media, and in turn, with new media.

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: Harper Collins.

This book, written about comics, is written in the form of a comic. It explains how comics are not necessarily mindless entertainment, but rather a robust medium of human expression. McCloud uses a "container" metaphor to explain the beauty of comics: he urges that we look not at the contents of comics, but at their potential, to appreciate how its conventions-- such as its highly developed system of symbols-- can convey information quickly and effectively. This book will go into my section on how information can be displayed visually in a highly effective manner. McCloud makes clear that comics can be the ultimate writing medium-- they can show, and not tell, better than most. This book will be in my literature review for sure, but will also figure prominently in my discussion of games and how we need to look at them as an empty vessel that can be appropriated for many purposes.

Stack, M., and Kelly, D.M. (2006). Popular Media, Education, and Resistance. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 29(1), 5 - 26.

Pointing to mounting evidence suggesting that children spend much of their free time enjoying various forms of media, such as television, videogames, and the World Wide Web, Stack and Kelly posit that teaching children how to interpret these texts can be helpful. To get children to view media as texts, however, the authors argue that kids must also become active authors of the same kinds of texts. They suggest that schools allocate more resources to media education in attempt to foster a higher degree of media awareness and appreciation. Whereas much scholarship on media literacy looks at education at the middle school and high school level, this article, which was published in the *Canadian Journal of Education*, focuses more on what steps can be taken to improve the media literacy of elementary school children. I hope to use this article to help define a basic media literacy for elementary school children in attempt to understand what constitutes one as being media literate in a particular age bracket.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. New York, Cambridge University Press.

Etienne Wenger's famous text is at first difficult to grasp, but upon further reading, provides valuable insight. At the center of Wenger's text is a social theory of learning. He believes that, because humans are social creatures, that it is natural and even good that we learn in a social environment. Contemporary schools and workplaces do not see things this way, and we are worse off as a result. While some of Wenger's case studies about people who work in the insurance industry are a bit dull, Wenger's bold proclamation and discussion of social learning is interesting-- and important to a discussion centering on the merits of new media technologies. I'll use this book in conjunction with the media literacy lit to explain the benefits of social learning spaces.