The posthuman university? Hybrid spaces and literacy practices.

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Overview

1. Ubiquitous technologies in HE
2. Posthuman university, cyborg literacies?
3. The VLE and the lecture
4. ‘Plagiarism’ and the writing subject
5. Conclusions & discussion
Centrality of representation

- Academic literacies as situated social practices (e.g. Lea & Stierer 2009)
- Language, text and identity work (e.g. Ruth 2008)
- Foucauldian understandings of discourse in the academy (e.g. Smith 2008)
- Semiotics & multimodality (Kress & van Leuwen 2003)
- Cultural studies approaches (e.g. Archer 2008)
Distributed identities
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House
The Thick of It

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How we became posthuman

‘...the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals’

(Hayles 1999: 3)
‘In the posthuman, there is no essential difference or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals’ (Hayles 1999: 3)

the posthuman subject as:

‘...an amalgam, a collection of heterogenous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction’ (Hayles 1999:3)
From cyborg to cognisphere

- Katherine Hayles (2006)

- Argues that Haraway’s cyborg is powerful metaphor but now ‘not *networked* enough’ (2006: 159)
- The individual no longer appropriate unit of analysis
- ‘...incorporation of intelligent machines into everyday practices creates distributed cognitive systems that include human and non-human actors; distributed cognition in turn is linked to a dispersed sense of self...’ (2006: 162)
The posthuman university?

- Material university also characterised by hybridity in terms of virtuality, immersion & co-presence.
- Ubiquitous networks & the VLE
- Laptops & mobile devices
- Distributed identities (e.g. Turkle 1995)
- Fragmentation, the uncanny, smooth vs striated space
The posthuman university?

- Immersion, & virtuality & co-presence are used to theorise Web 2.0 & virtual environments. However, may also have purchase when applied to the wider university.
The university as a media system

- ‘Elearning’ and ‘face to face’ as false binary
- F2F as ‘natural’
- Technologies of mediation, oracy and print literacies
- Lecture room as symbolically charged space
- Printing press unseating academic authority
- Link to current moral panic discourses
Cyborg literacies?

- The screen has superceded the page (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001)
- Virtual worlds require a ‘constellation’ of literacy practices (Steinkueler 2007)
- Complexity /hybrity demand greater focus on the visual in research (Gourlay 2010) and on ‘Cyborg literacies’ of students and staff (Gourlay 2011)
- Digital mediation has lead to ‘flickering signifiers’ (Hayles 1999)
‘When narrative functionalities change, a new kind of reader is produced by the text. The material effects of flickering signification ripple outwards...the impatience that some readers now feel with print texts...has a physiological as well as a psychological basis. They miss pushing the keys and seeing the cursor blinking at them... Changes in narrative functionalities are deeper than the structural or thematic characteristics of a particular genre, for they shift the embodied responses and expectations that different kinds of textualities evoke. When new media are introduced, the changes transform the environment as a whole’

(Hayles 1999: 48)
The VLE

- The VLE has changed the temporal and embodied nature of prototypical f2f encounters.
- Textual practices surround the ‘lecture’.
- Event itself is closely bound in a tight network of digitally mediated textual practices.
- Event has become irretrievably permeable to digital mediation.
- These factors render the ‘f2f’ encounter hybrid, multiple and posthuman.
‘Plagiarism’

- Posthuman reading of ‘plagiarism’
- Hybridised, digital, multivocal and distributed textual practices around reading and desk research
- Text itself essentially masquerades as an artefact from print literacies: analogue, positing a stable, single subject as author.
Ubiquitous networked technologies foreground notions of virtuality, immersion and copresence.

The wider university may be seen as hybrid and posthuman in terms of subjectivities and representational practices.

This creates tensions surrounding the notions of:
- stable and singular textual authorship
- embodied vs virtual
- digital vs analogue
- individual vs distributed
Thank you - any questions?

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