


# Young people, Facebook and Pedagogy: Recognizing Contemporary Forms of Multimodal Text Making

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## **Young people, Facebook and pedagogy: Recognizing contemporary forms of multimodal text making**

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### **Text making in a changing social and semiotic world**

The contemporary semiotic world poses sharp questions about text making. Whether we look at text made by young children (Kress, 1997; Mavers, 2011), students in secondary school (Ranker, 2012; Yandell, 2013; Burn, 2014) and in higher education (Archer, 2010), or YouTube users (Adami, 2014), what becomes visible is that text-makers draw on several modes of representation, and in many texts writing is not the central means for making meaning. People, including young people, have always drawn on a range of different 'modes' - writing and image foremost among them, yet a combination of social change and new technologies have given rise to the possibilities for an increase in the use of more and other modes than these, in new 'ensembles' of modes, and with differently distributed functions. Hence text making is no longer organised around separate modes; the question is no longer whether to, say, 'write' or to present something via image, but what to use writing for and what to use image for, where to place written components and images, and how to articulate the connections between them.

In this paper we aim to begin to develop theoretical and methodological tools to account for these changes in text making. While changes in and contemporary usage of writing in digital environments have attracted significant attention from sociolinguists with an interest in new media (see Androutsopoulos 2011, for an overview), we propose to develop an encompassing framework for understanding how (young) people use a range of modes of representation –writing, typography, image, moving image,

speech, colour, et cetera- to make text. Instead of studying changes in the use of each of these in isolation, or studying (changes in) some modes and not others, we aim to develop an integrated account of contemporary text making. Such an account attends to the socially, culturally and materially shaped potential of modes and multimodal ensembles.

Our framework recognizes changes in text making in relation to the technological affordances of contemporary platforms for text making, as well as current social change; more specifically, changes in power and in principles and agencies of control. These are –among others– about a shift from vertical to horizontal social structures, from hierarchical to more open, participatory relations. The shift has effects in many ways: such as the disintegration of formerly stable social frames, leading to changes in genres; or in changes of access to and notions of authorship and canonicity. This wholesale change in social relations means that participation in semiotic production now describes the characteristics of communication more accurately than, for instance, the traditional sender-message-receiver model. With former structures of power, the characterization of the relation of ‘audience’ to ‘author’ had been that of ‘consumption’ or ‘acquisition’ in the domain of ‘education’. With present distributions of power, *production* and *participation* are the ruling dispositions of many of those who had previously been seen as ‘audience’.

These social changes have significant effects on text making. Where previously text making rested on relatively stable notions of ‘author’ and ‘reader’ it now involves a wide and diversified range of meaning makers. Where previously routines of convention were expressed in dichotomies such as ‘formal-informal’, ‘standard-vernacular’, serving as reliable guides in composition, in the contemporary world there is a need to assess on each *occasion* of text-making what the social relations with an audience are, what *platforms* and *resources* there are for making and disseminating the text, what *local norms* are operating, and how these fit with what is to be communicated and with a clear understanding of the characteristics of the audience. Smartphones and tablets are now ubiquitous, alongside platforms for

producing and/or disseminating multimodal text –Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Powerpoint, Movie Maker and so forth. These platforms equip (young) people with resources for producing and disseminating multimodal texts on a much wider range of occasions than before, across different institutional and non-institutional contexts.

Divergent, contradictory, confusing views dominate debates on contemporary practices in text making. One frequently voiced concern is that as young people are using image more, their writing skills have declined, as ‘evidenced’, for instance, in non-standard spelling and new orthographic forms, and the absence of complete and complex sentences in, for instance, text messaging or ‘chatting’. Another concern is that young people’s ‘creative’, ‘authentic’, ‘original’ writing has declined, as ‘evidenced’, for instance, in frequent ‘copying and pasting’ (but see Mavers, 2011). All this leads some to conclude that literacy skills are under threat or declining, and that contemporary text making practice must inevitably lead to the ‘loss’ of a profound kind, not just for literacy (see, e.g., Baron, 2008) and text making but for all of culture and, by a further effect, is bound to have deleterious effects on economic performance, as witnessed in OECD sponsored studies such as PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS.

These concerns fail to consider seriously and to attempt to recognize the practices, aesthetics, ethics and epistemologies of contemporary forms of text production. New theoretical means are needed for making sense of these to replace the 19<sup>th</sup> century models underpinning those concerns. Where up to two decades ago maybe, competence in relation to one mode, *writing*, was seen as sufficient for the task of the composition of a text, we now need to understand the semiotic potentials of all resources and platforms involved in the design and production of *multimodal* text. Where previously competence in a relatively small set of relevant genres was seen as sufficient for participating effectively in different social domains, we now need to understand how text makers respond to the specific demands and social conditions of a much wider range of different occasions for text making.

There is an urgent and pressing need to produce apt accounts of contemporary multimodal text making. First, texts are social and cultural artefacts, i.e. signs of engagement with the contemporary world, which need to be recognized and documented. Second, in order to prepare young people for participation in that world they need an apt semiotic 'toolkit'. For instance, the 'meta-language' (e.g. 'grammar') traditionally taught at school, does not account for image, moving image, and other modes of representation now central to text making. Indeed the school curriculum may need considerable rethinking (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Some curricula maintain strong boundaries between sets of resources typically used in combination. For instance, the 'attainment targets' for primary education in the Netherlands, which is the setting for the case study we present in this paper, mention 'layout', 'image' and 'colour' in the margin of one of six targets for writing, while some notion of multimodality is introduced under the heading of 'artistic expression' (this target translates as 'the students learn to use image, language, music, play and movement, to express feelings and experiences and to communicate with'; Greven & Letschert, 2006). Yet others are rethinking the curriculum from a multimodal perspective, redefining traditional boundaries between language, visual, music and performance arts, and drawing out principles of composition across those formerly separate subject areas (Albers & Sanders, 2010). Third, a multimodal perspective opens the full range of different contexts for text making, both inside and outside school, allowing teachers to consider connections, disconnections and gaps between these two domains.

The multimodal approach we introduce and illustrate in this paper is set within a *social semiotic* framework. We give an outline of this theoretical framework in the next section, followed by a discussion of the materials and methods we have used for this paper. Following that, we give an account of a 12-year-old boy's text making on Facebook, in two parts. In the first part, we explore the types of texts he produces and their occurrences in the course of his first year on Facebook. In the second part, we zoom in on one specific text, investigating the ways in which he uses the resources available to him to construct a multimodal text. Our aim is – among other issues – to show what

might be gained from a theoretical and empirical focus on multimodal *text*, namely, the recognition of the ‘semiotic resourcefulness’ (Mavers, 2007) of text makers as they address an audience, using the means of representation and communication made available by a digital platform. In the closing section, we consider the pedagogic implications of such a multimodal social semiotic account.

### **A social semiotic approach to text making**

The theoretical frame of our account of contemporary text making is social semiotics. A social semiotic approach to text places multimodality and agency in meaning *making* at the centre of attention (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2010). It ascribes meaning to all modes of communication, including image, writing, typography, layout. It treats signs of any kind as reflecting the *interests* of the makers of these signs – here, young people. In each of the modes used, *semiotic work* – attending, engaging, selecting, transforming, integrating, ordering – is done by both makers and ‘readers’ (-as-remakers / transformers) of text. In one mode certain semiotic work is to be done *by* the reader (the layout of a modular text, say), in another, simultaneously present mode, certain work has been done *for* the reader by the designer (in continuous segments of writing, say). Contemporary (multimodal) text design is based on such ‘division of labour’, and only by looking at the entire, multimodal design can we reconstruct these complex social relations which are evident in the text.

In this perspective, *producers* are regarded as *sign-makers* as are *users-as-interpreters* of text, and, in that, both are seen as *meaning-makers*. Signs are elements in which meaning and form have been brought together in a relation motivated by the interest of the sign-maker. A sign made by a text ‘designer’ is *re-made* (‘interpreted’) by a ‘user’/‘reader’ (who may or may not represent the audience imagined by the text maker). *Sign-making* is always subject to the availability of semiotic resources and to the aptness of the resources to the meanings which the sign-maker wishes to realize. In principle, limitations of resources apply always and everywhere, even if not with the same severity: different *platforms* make available different sets of resources. Nevertheless,

the design of a text is treated by us as the sign-maker's apt representation of her or his interest, given the resources available in the circumstances which prevail. This means that the signs made by the text 'makers' are never exact replicas when they are *re-made* by its 'users'. This points to a significant difference between our social semiotic theory of communication and theories which assume that 'messages' are 'encoded', 'transferred' and then 'decoded'.

The interest of the producer of the texts at issue here is rhetorical. Rhetorical interest responds to the rhetor's question "what is my preferred social relation with my imagined audience and how can I best realise it?" The producer's as well as the audience's interests are shaped by the social, cultural, economic, political and technological environments in which signs are made; the design is the result of the interaction between all of these. At the same time, sign-makers have to be aware of the *media* of distribution for their signs. These are now usually spoken of as 'platforms', especially in the case of digital environments - and the rhetor's awareness is factored into the making of the sign.

Signs are made using the resources of *modes*. A *mode* is a socially and culturally shaped resource for making meaning. Modes can be used to represent what the world is like, how people relate in social settings, and how semiotic entities are connected. *Image, writing, layout, colour, typography, music* are examples of *modes* used in (contemporary) text. Modes each offer differing representational resources. Writing for instance, has syntactic, grammatical and lexical as well as typographical resources such as type size, font and letter fit. *Speech* and *writing* share certain aspects of *grammar, syntax* and *lexis*. Beyond these, *speech* has resources specific to sound: of intonation for instance, of loudness, length, tone of voice. *Image* has resources such as pictorial detail, size, colour, spatial relation of depicted entities, placement in a framed space, shape. These different resources can be used to do different kinds of semiotic work; or to do broadly similar semiotic work through the differential use of (elements of) resources. Modes, that is, have different material bases, which have been shaped, over time, by

their social users, to become tools with which to 'mean'. Each mode enables sign-makers to do specific semiotic work in relation to their interests and their rhetorical intentions for designs and communication of meaning; which, in modal ensembles, best meet the rhetor's interest and sense of the needs of the actual or imagined audience. That is, by drawing on the specific affordances of each mode in the making of modal ensembles, sign-makers can achieve the complex, often contradictory demands of their own interest, of the needs of the matter to be communicated, of characteristics of the audience, and of their relation to that audience in terms of power.

Given the complex relation of modal affordance, rhetor's interest, and the variability and complexity of social environments, *design* moves into the centre of attention in the making of complex signs-as-texts. The shift, conceptually, from *composition* to *design* mirrors a social shift from competence in a specific practice conceived in terms of understanding of and adherence to convention governing the use of a mode –writing, say– to a focus on the interest and agency of the designer in the making of signs-as-texts. Design is the practice where modes, media and platforms on the one hand, and rhetorical purposes, the designer's interests and the characteristics of the audience on the other are brought into (some) coherence with each other. From the designer's perspective, design is the (intermediary) process of giving shape to the interests, purposes and intentions of the rhetor in relation to the semiotic resources which are available for realizing these purposes as apt material signs, texts for the assumed characteristics of a specific audience.

### **Methods and materials**

The examples we present in this paper are drawn from a case study of a 12-year-old Dutch boy's text-making on Facebook. He and his parents have consented to the research. Our corpus of texts made by the boy, whom we call Daan, consists of all the 28 posts he produced in the first year of his Facebook life, as well as his 'profile' pages.



Our methods of analysis are focused on the textual fine grain. We aim to render visible what ‘stuff’ and ‘tools’ (young) people use to conjoin meaning and form, drawing on socially and culturally shaped histories of meaning making. Through detailed analysis of *text*, as with the analysis (or ‘deciphering’) of other cultural artifacts, such as old inscriptions in a cave, we reconstruct the principles underpinning their composition. Thus the focus of our analytical efforts is directed towards the multimodal design of the texts produced. This is a deliberate methodological choice; following Halliday, and building on social semiotics (Kress, 2010), we engage with text as cultural artifacts, documenting the means that text makers use and the choice they make in re-presenting the world, in constructing social relations with their audience, and in bringing signs together to form coherent textual entities.

In all modes we attended to principles of selection (what is selected for representation, what is left out), highlighting (what is foregrounded, what is backgrounded), and arrangement (how are semiotic entities ordered) (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). In *writing* we attended to generic structure, information structure, lexis, and syntax, drawing on Halliday (1985) and Hodge & Kress (1988). In *image*, we attended to the notions of concept and narrative, drawing on Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006). In *video*, we attended to frame, shot and angle, drawing on Burn (2014). In *layout* we attended to placement, orientation and alignment of constituent text elements (Ambrose & Harris 2005). We also explored the relations between the constituent elements of text, drawing on Barthes (1977) and Martinec & Salway (2005); the functional distribution of modes, drawing on Kress 2010, and cross-modal cohesion, drawing on Halliday & Hasan (1976).

As we analyse texts we also consider the platforms and wider social context that shape their production. Thus we attend to the ways in which the platform –in this case, Facebook– and the resources it makes available, as well as the social conditions in which it and its users live their lives, shape the texts we analysed. In short interviews with Daan we discussed his experiences on Facebook, and mapped his connections to his Facebook Friends.

## Text making on Facebook

Daan joined Facebook in Jan 2013, when he was 12 years old. Facebook's official age limit is 13, but this can be circumvented by entering a false date of birth. One year on, he has 33 'Friends' on Facebook: this is his 'audience' on this platform. They include 20 'peers' (13 boys, 7 girls), including classmates, other friends from the neighbourhood, and his sister; 3 cousins, all 16+; and 10 adults, including his mother, 6 uncles and 1 aunt, and two female adult friends of the family. Except for 3 of his uncles and the aunt, all 'Friends' live in the same city; the majority in the same neighbourhood, where he meets them face-to-face on a daily basis. He himself does not (yet) post frequently on Facebook—23 posts in the first year; but he reads what his Friends post every day. Most of the time, he accesses Facebook on his iPhone 5, using a Facebook App.

After one year of being on Facebook, Daan's 'wall' shows 28 'texts'. Of those, 23 were posted by himself; 1 was a 'status update' of someone else who had 'tagged' him (i.e. added a link to Daan's profile in a post created by that other person). Of the 23 self-initiated posts, 15 are 'status updates'; 4 are posts created through other platforms; 4 are 'links' shared. 4 more texts appeared on his wall, all 'authored' by Facebook: 1 notification of Daan joining Facebook, and 3 notifications of a change of his profile picture. Table 1 maps the number of each type of post on a timeline.

	jan-march	april-june	jul-sept	oct-dec	total
FB notification	2		2		4
Tagged by Friend		1			1
Shared link	1	3	1		5
Via other platform		2			2
Status update		3	12	1	16
Total	3	9	15	1	28

Table 1: Number of 'posts' on Daan's Wall, per type and term

Thus the most common type of text is the 'status update'. The status update on Facebook is

“an update feature which allows users to discuss their thoughts, whereabouts, or important information with their friends. Similar to a tweet on the social networking site Twitter, a status update is usually short and generally gives information without going into too much detail. When a status is updated, it posts on the user's personal wall, as well as in the news feeds of their friends. Statuses can be updated from a web browser, mobile site, or through text message.”

(whatIs.techtarget.com)

Daan posted his first status update in June. In the following 6 months, his updates change in form. The first 3 updates, all posted in June, consist of writing only: 'cool', 'cool' and "nice more friends'. In the second half of the year he begins to use the 'event report', reporting what he is up to, using self-made pictures and one written sentence ('on way to beach', 'Enjoying having a drink with Jaap', 'I am going to Sweet hurray').

The 4 *posts created through other platforms* are pictures and videos Daan made himself which are then edited automatically by the other platform to create special effects, making someone look old (AgingBooth), or making someone have a moustache (Boothstache), or in 'Action Movie' even suggesting that the person featuring in the video is being shot at. All these posts created in other platforms were made in the first 6 months of Daan's Facebook life. Only one is accompanied by a written comment by Daan ('Yo this is my little brother'). The other pictures are of himself, with special effects but still recognizably 'Daan'.

The 4 *links shared* are a YouTube film of a cat watching TV titled 'dramatic cat'; this was posted twice (perhaps a sign of trying to work out how to share links); a picture of a woman with 'can I eat more' superimposed; and a link to an online game to which Daan had signed up ('Online Soccer Manager'). These 4 posts were also made in the first half of the year. Note that these

posts re-use materials produced by others, while the other 19 posts he made are based on pictures, videos and written text produced by Daan.

A total of 20 posts include image or video. Of those, 14 include image or video produced by Daan himself. In 2 posts he uses videos or image produced by others, as in the example will discuss in the next section. In another post, produced by a Friend, he was ‘tagged’.

Taken together the 23 posts he produced himself show a development from creating ‘funny’ pictures made on external platforms and sharing links to stuff on other external platform (YouTube) to creating a typical type of status update: reporting an event—of which the ‘koermeten’ post we will discuss in the next section is one example. We understand this development as a change in Daan’s interest, prompting a gradual *expansion of his repertoire* of text types. We might say that for him the resources for text making on Facebook have been augmented. Learning has taken place: Daan has achieved an augmentation of his capacities for representation, through his making of signs. An augmentation of resources constitutes at the same time a change in potentials for action, and, in this, a change in identity.

### **Designing a multimodal status update**

We will now look at one of Daan’s texts on Facebook in more detail. We picked the most recent status update, posted on 31 Dec, exactly one year after he joined Facebook, to explore the semiotic resources he draws on after 23 posts, and 16 status updates on this platform. A snapshot of the post is presented here as Figure 1.



Figure 1: Daan's status update on Facebook

The post contains a written component and a (still from a) video that can be played by readers of the update. The written component is placed above the video, as a 'heading', prompting the reader to engage with the writing before playing the video. This *reading path* does not reflect the order of production. Daan first made a video in one platform –iPhone Camera– then moved it to another –Facebook. In Facebook, the post was created, using the video and writing. Figure 2 shows what the *site of production* for updating your status on (the English version of) a Facebook App for iPhone looks like.



Figure 2: Status update interface on Facebook App for iPhone

The example illustrates the expansion of the range of occasions for text making: in the pre-mobile phone era one would not have written on occasions such as these, let alone composing a text using writing and video. At the same time we might consider the constraints of the size and touch-screen key-board and its effects on the length of texts made on a smartphone. One factor leads to an increase in the number of texts being produced; another factor leads to a limitation on the size of written text-elements that can be produced—though the limits on the size of the text are different again. There are also limitations on the resources made available by Facebook for composing a text. For instance, the size, type, colour, weight and other features of the font are fixed by Facebook, and there limitations on the placement of text elements, the length of the written elements, and so forth.

These limitations have changed significantly since Facebook was launched in 2004, and are likely to continue to change, with the further effect of increasing the possibilities for text making, for instance, in the editing of photographs.

Before we explore the writing and the video in this post and the relations between them in more detail we consider the *'interest'* of the text maker (Kress, 1997). 'Interest' arises out of the text maker's social, cultural, affective, material position in the world, shaping attention to and engagement with the world. Daan's post demonstrates an interest in a particular occasion and an interest in communicating selected features of the occasion to a known audience of friends and family as the featured event is unfolding. Put differently, his attention is drawn to selected elements in the social, cultural and material environment he is in; and he in turn draws the attention of his audience to (some of) those elements. In so doing Daan makes choices about what to select and how to represent it. Only what is 'critical' is represented; other features are left out or are back-grounded. Only that which can be articulated with the resources available for representation is represented; other features are 'lost' in the process of text making. Hence only some of the people present in the environment that Daan was in are introduced, leaving others unnoticed. Readers get a glimpse of what selected parts of the environment looks like, while they can only imagine what it smelled like.

In 'entextualising' the world around him Daan made choices about meaning and form. One choice is about the *platform* to be used for the production and dissemination of his text. For instance, Daan also frequently uses WhatsApp (now owned by Facebook). The potentials and constraints for text making on each differs significantly, and so does the audience he can reach on each. Hence making text now requires an assessment of the aptness of fit between platform, which has implications for resources available for text making and audience, and the text maker's interest.

Another choice is about the *type* of text. Daan's post takes the form of a common type of 'status update' on Facebook and other social networks: the live report of an event in which the author is taking part. The report is brief, so

that it can be produced, disseminated and read instantly, with relatively little effort (Lee 2011). In this case, Daan wrote,

(1) Leuk met oom en vader en neef koermeten

In English, this would translate roughly to, 'Enjoying dining with uncle and father and cousin' (a word-by-word translation would be, 'Nice with uncle and father and cousin dining').

The adverb in first position, 'Leuk', ('nice') modifies what follows: *met oom en vader en neef koermeten*. The prepositional phrase in second position, *met oom* and *vader* and *neef*, describes a *selection* of the people around him. Other people co-present, including his siblings, are excluded. He describes the participants in relational terms, well suited for an audience that is not familiar with the proper names of his relatives. The verb in last position, *koermeten* (spelled as a non-standard variation of 'gourmetten'), refers to cooking on a raclette, which in the Netherlands is typically done on special occasions, e.g., during the festive season. Participants grill different kinds of charcuterie, vegetables, as well as pancakes (not so much cheese, as in the Swiss version), each guest using their own little pan. Thus, *koermeten* describes a well-understood, culturally shaped social event.

Daan also made a choice about the *order of the constituent written elements*: He placed the verb describing the activity in finite position, which is an entirely unmarked order in Dutch. He could also have chosen any one of the following 'grammatical' alternatives:

(2) Leuk koermeten met oom en vader en neef

(3) Met oom en vader en neef koermeten, leuk

(4) Koermeten met oom en vader en neef, leuk

As well as that, he could have varied the order of the named participants:

(5) met vader en oom en neef



(6) met neef en oom en vader

(7) met vader en neef en oom

So why did Daan choose (1), and not any of the other possibilities? One possible principle Daan may have followed is 'I put the elements in order of significance': 'I place that which is most important to me first'. Hence 'leuk' –a description of his mood/appraisal of the reported event- is placed in first position; and (selected) participants, starting with the host (his uncle), in second position, before the activity in which they are engaged, suggesting that to Daan, being 'with' others was more significant than what they did. He uses this structure in other status updates too; e.g., in 'lekker met Jaap aan het drinken' ('enjoying –with Jaap– having a drink'); indeed the appraisal-participants-activity structure appears to be the *preferred* structure for the written component of his reporting of social events.

#### *Video: moving image and sound*

The video is 12 seconds long and made by Daan with his iPhone. The camera work is shaky. The frame moves from right to left and back, giving a 'panoramic', 180 degrees close-up view of the camera holder's surround from a low/eye-level angle. The video *shows* parts of some people in a room, where in the room they are, and what they orient to. In the foreground, one adult is shown standing, orienting to an object on the table; a child tries to get in frame of the camera. In the background, some people are on a sofa. The TV is on. Two lights are visible, including one star shaped light hanging in front of a window. It is night time. In the dimmed light the people appear as silhouettes; the vision is blurry; and as the camera moves quickly it is all the more difficult to identify people and objects. Fragments of speech are audible: one adult refers to food ('shoarma'), a child calls for mama; and there's sizzling of some kind.

#### *Writing-video relations*

If we assume that 'readers' of the post will have engaged with Daan's writing before playing the video, we might say that the writing *frames* the video. Indeed without having read the written texts (as 'heading') first, the video is

difficult to interpret (in Barthes' (1973) terms, the writing 'anchors' the image; it "*directs* the reader through the signifieds of the image", p.40). There are other signs shaping the meaning-making work of readers too: above the text written by Daan are the elements automatically generated by Facebook, i.e. the author's name and the date and means of posting. As posts are often read immediately or soon after they've come in, readers will also place the post, which the writing suggests is a 'live update' of an on-going event, in the context of the festive season: it is New Year's Eve, and people are celebrating, engaging in more or less predictable activities.

Knowing it is (or was) New Year's Eve, and, having read Daan's writing first, readers are likely to interpret the adult's actions, the sizzling sound and the reference to 'shoarma' in the video as relating to the grilling of food on a raclette; and assumptions may be made about the identity of the adult in the foreground- uncle or father. In other words, readers make links between the various components of the post, expecting *cohesion*: "a potential for relating one element in the text to another, wherever they are and without any implication that everything in the text has some part in it." (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 27). In Daan's text, the writing names an activity ('koermeten') which is coherent with the actions depicted in the video. The writing introduces an uncle, father and cousin; the moving image shows an adult and two children, leaving some room for uncertainty about how they map onto each other.

These cross-modal 'repetitions' of selected participants represented in writing and moving image produce cohesion: an element in one mode can be related to another; they are part of a single integrated text. How writing and the video operate in a single frame can also be explored by asking: What if the video was left out, or what if readers chose not to play the video? What does the video provide that the written sentence doesn't? Here we might say that the writing is an 'abstraction': concrete events are transcribed into generic categories, selecting some of its constituent elements while leaving out others. In this case, the writing doesn't describe many of the specifics of the circumstances, such as features of the setting; or indeed characteristics of the

participants: what they look like, how they sound, et cetera- yet above all to give an 'impression' of the atmosphere (in Kress & Van Leeuwen's (2006) terms' a 'symbolic suggestive process'), depicting a 'generalized essence', the gist rather than the detail, complementing the description given in the writing, 'leuk' ('nice').

This shows how modes operate in ensembles serving complementary *functions*: writing describes the social relations between the text maker and the people represented in the text; the occasion of the gathering; and it provides an appraisal of the situation from the text maker's point of view. None of this information is provided by the moving image, by speech or other mode in the video. The video shows some of the more specific actions involved in the event, and some of the characteristics of the participants not mentioned in the written sentence, including visual and vocal features, giving an impression of mood or atmosphere. Without one or the other, the text wouldn't be the same; they are mutually modifying.

#### *The placement of posts in 'news feeds'*

When Daan posted the text he had created, it was 'slotted in' a range of different texts, generated by Facebook algorithms and partially shaped by the settings ('customisations') of Daan's Friends/audience and the devices they use to read these texts. On this level of appearance, text is composed through a complex interaction between different types of 'designers' (platform and algorithm designers and authors of individual texts) and readers, in ways typical of digital platforms (see, for instance, Caple's (2013) account of online newspapers).

In Facebook terms, the 'encompassing' texts in which texts made by others are collated are so-called News Feeds, which, according to Facebook's 'glossary of terms', is "an ongoing list of updates on your homepage that shows you what's new with the friends and Pages you follow." On the News Feed texts are organised vertically, indeed as a list, with the most recently posted text appearing on top. When scrolling down, older texts appear.

The News Feed appears as an encompassing text as Facebook produces coherence across the posts: it fixes the layout, background colours, and font; pictures are cropped, and so forth, so that different posts look the same, even though they are produced by different people and are different on many other levels.

On the News Feed, posts are separated by horizontal hairlines, and marked by a profile picture and two written elements generated by Facebook, providing the name of the *author* of the text, the date (in Daan's case, 31 December 2013), and the means of posting (in Daan's case, via iOS, i.e. with an iPhone). The author's name is highlighted by embolding. These elements appear above the texts produced by the Facebook users; below it appears the 'like/unlike – comment – share' bar, giving Friends an opportunity to 'interact' with the post. Thus on the News Feed each post is vertically, sequentially organised, with three 'slots'; text in the first slot is more or less fixed, the second slot is filled with the text produced by the author of the post, and the third slot is filled with evaluations and comments from Friends.

The text in first position serves significant framing functions. In Daan's case, it 'tells' readers that it is Daan who is reporting (and perhaps for that reason Daan leaves the subject position in his written text empty), and that he is reporting on New Year's Eve. That he uses his mobile phone for this could suggest that he is providing the report when the event reported is still ongoing, matching or substituting present continuous tense marking in writing (in Dutch present continuous can be transcribed using the preposition 'aan', as in 'aan het drinken'; it does not have an equivalent of the English inflectional suffix 'ing', as in, 'Enjoying').

By looking at the placement of Daan's text in a News Feed some of the effects of Daan's choices become visible: for instance, the effect of including a video. Without the video (or a picture), the salience of the post on a News Feed would have been lower. The video/still takes up more space than the single line of writing, so that it potentially stands out more, potentially 'luring' Friends in. With potentially many different posts by different people to

compete with, such forms of highlighting (in this case perhaps not produced with that intention) may become essential for making oneself visible.

At this point we might also ask what the effects are of using a video instead of a photo. One such effect is *inclusion*: you'd need several pictures to capture the 180 degrees view that Daan portrayed. Another effect is *sequentiality*: the video, when played, unfolds in time, potentially raising excitement on the part of the audience of not knowing what will be revealed (unlike a single picture, in which all elements are simultaneously available). It may also be that Daan had just learned how to post a video from iPhone directly onto Facebook.

Daan's post attracted 'likes' from 6 Facebook Friends, including 4 uncles, 1 adult neighbour and 1 neighbour friend. One of the (English-speaking) uncles also added a short comment ('Miss you Daan'). What these 'likes' and 'comments' show is that his post was noticed. They are signs of engagement with the post; indeed this post is the highest number of likes/comments he has received on any post in his first year on Facebook. These signs of engagement are likely to shape Daan's future text making; through these signs Daan might learn what types or features of a post his audience is drawn to.

### **Outlook: Towards a pedagogy of text making**

Our case study showed, first, that through a detailed analysis of multimodal text made by a 12-year-old on Facebook we are able to recognize some of the semiotic resources that the boy draws on, and some of the principles he follows when making text of this kind. These resources and principles could provide a useful starting point for an assessment of what he already knows and what might need to be taught and learned in school; for instance, how to make text on other social occasions, and with different platforms—for instance, a Powerpoint presentation about a curricular topic (cf. Yandell, 2013). The analysis of Daan's text making also shows what a 'meta-language' for text making ought to account for. For instance, it might draw attention to

such issues as 'cohesion' across modes and the 'affordances' and 'functional distribution' of modes.

Lastly, the analysis renders visible competencies central to contemporary text making, such as filming, that may not yet be part of the curriculum. The principles of text making that we have here rendered visible demonstrate competence in multimodal design, including knowledge of the availability of some of the semiotic resources on Facebook; knowledge of the affordances of these resources; knowledge of a generic form commonly used on that platform and on the occasion he is experiencing; knowledge of writing, knowledge of video-making; knowledge of multimodal composition; knowledge of audience; and knowledge of the 'aptness of fit' between interest on the one hand, and platforms, resources, and forms of text on the other. These competencies will continue to develop. For instance, as he continues to make text on Facebook, he might learn how to 'tag' Facebook Friends named in his posts.

We also recognize that in other contexts, young people make quite different types of text. For instance, we explored some short films produced by 15-year-old Greek students (see Dafermakis, Triliva and Varvantakis, this volume). Like the films studied by Gilje (2010), the 'machinimas' analysed by Burn (2014) and video-interactions discussed by Adami (2010) these texts were produced and disseminated in entirely different platforms (including film editing software, YouTube), involving different modes (including moving image, music), and different notions of timing and commitment.

Our point is that young people today develop *repertoires* of text making competences in response to shifting social demands and technological affordances, with profound effects on what 'text' looks like. Where previously 'complexity' of text making lay primarily with the mode of writing, now complexity lies in the vastly extended range of different social occasions for text making on the one hand, in the (inter-)relations between these resources, in the vastly extended range of platforms and semiotic resources now available for text making on the other.

These new forms of complexity need to be recognized and documented. The future uses, shapes, potentials of text making as well as conceptions of text making pedagogies need to be considered within a clear sense of social environments. Pedagogy is a specific instance of a larger-level social practice with its relations, processes and structures, characterized by a focus on particular selections and shaping of 'knowledge' (as 'curriculum') and learning (as engagement with and transformation of that 'curriculum' in relation to the learner's interest), in or out of institutions such as schools, university, etc. Social relations in pedagogic settings shape engagement with the cultural technologies of representation (modes), production ('tools') and dissemination (media): they are active in selection and shaping of modes to be used in representation. In this way they shape valuations of *writing* (compared to *image* for instance), conceptions of 'canonicity' and shape individual dispositions, and make what was socially produced and is culturally available seem natural, normal, routinized and grooved.

At the moment the school is caught between different conceptions of authority and agency in relation to production of knowledge, to the authoring of texts, the authority/canonicity of knowledge and of semiotic forms. But learning has long since left the confines of institutions such as school, university, college, etc. and forms of pedagogy have to accommodate to 'life-long', life-wide' learning, that is, learning at *all times*, by those who have every right for their interests to be taken with utmost seriousness, in *all sites*, in *all phases* of professional and personal life. In school, many young people see themselves as authors of the knowledge they want, of the kinds of texts that meet their social, personal and affective needs and in that they come into conflict with the sharply differing conceptions and practices of the school. Hence conceptions of pedagogy held by 'the school' are at loggerheads with those held – however implicitly – by those in school. In that stand-off, conceptions of pedagogy will need to be developed which accommodate the conflicting interests of generation, of power, of politics and of an ever more globalizing market-dominated economy. Clearly, the agency of learners has to be taken as the central plank. Equally clearly, the insights, understandings, values,

knowledges which are the results of centuries and millennia of social and cultural work cannot and should not suddenly be ditched.

These considerations apply for pedagogies for/of *text making*. *Pedagogically*, the agency and the centrality of designers and of readers, of those who make meanings, has to be the starting point. *Semiotically*, *writing* has to be seen at all times as part of *multimodal design* arising from a specific *rhetorical interest*. In such designs the affordances of all modes are judged and used in relation to that. Given its long history of social preponderance, *writing* has present social valuations which are part of its social affordances. *Design* is prospective and therefore always necessarily innovative and transformative rather than competent implementation of conventionally given practices. Social agency and the interested process of design engage with the affordances – socially and semiotically – of the media and the means/resources of production.

In that context a pedagogy of *writing* has to be seen as an integral part of a framing pedagogy of text making, in which writing has a specific place. Components of that pedagogy are multimodal representation and sensitivity to media and their affordances. In a globalizing environment, both in local manifestations, eg London as a microcosm of the global, and in manifestations beyond the local – with profoundly different conceptions of social positions, semiotic resources and notions of ‘the public domain’ – pedagogies of communication have to be sensitive to the particularities of the specific locality.

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