

## **Anne Wysocki interviewed by Victor Vitanza**

### **Victor Vitanza**

How was your webtext innovative in the historical and/or material/technological context(s) within which it was created?

### **Anne Wysocki**

So, how was my webtext innovative in the historical/material/technological context within which it was created? Since Susan sent us these questions I've been wondering about that one. Um, I honestly don't know. I mean, I knew that I was pushing against what I could do technologically just because of bandwidth. I wanted to have sound in there—I would have loved to have had sound in "Bookling Monument," but there was just no way to do it. There was no way to include that along with everything else. So I was pushing a little bit against what could go down the pipes, I guess. Historically, I'm not sure. I mean, for me I have to say the piece was about trying to use, um, available software for thinking, to be thinking through the software, to be thinking about what I could do with the software. The origins of the piece were in a paper I presented at an AIR conference, must have been in 2001 or 2002. And I had noticed online these representation of books, and in games like Mist and Maria Harvey's site, these visual representations of books, where the books were shown as being sick and really ugly and crappy—I mean, in intriguing ways—but falling apart and breaking. And so I'd given a paper about that. And Gail Hawisher afterwards asked, uh, so what? What was that all about? And I don't know if in that paper I had worked it out, but I thought, well, I'm working with these pictures and I need to be able to work with these pictures in order to show what I'm doing. And so I thought, well, see what happens by using Director online. And if I show these pictures—and I knew that what I was talking about was that books had been connected to bodies metaphorically in all kinds of ways, and vice versa. And if books were being shown to be sick that meant that bodies were being shown to be sick. So—and because this is metaphoric it's not something I wanted to work out so much in words. And so I thought, let's see what I can do with pictures and Director. And then it just turned into fun. It turned into sort of associative logics and what can I do with body parts and how can I use body parts to explore the creepiness of things. Some of the shortcomings, I think, is that I was a little too literal, like, in the representations of networks and stuff. But, um, so I don't know if that's innovative necessarily for anybody more than me. I mean, I was playing with how taking seriously what was possible visually and interactively within Director would encourage my thinking, and it did help me work out the arguments to a certain extent. But it was also given the limitations of screen size and what I could do—limiting in that I couldn't have longer text. So everything had to be, um, short and suggestive, I think, rather than, you know, really developed in those ways.

### **Victor Vitanza**

How do you see your webtext as having influenced the trajectory of the field? How might it continue to have influence?

**Anne Wysocki**

How do I see the text as having influenced the trajectory of the field? How might it continue to have influence? I don't know. Um, I was happy this past October at a conference, Doug Eyman introduced me and talked about "Bookling Monument" and how, um, he remembered it and still looked at it, I think, or, you know, how it's still held a place. I mean, I don't think there's been much done like it, um, not because it was this amazing piece or anything but because software has changed so much. I mean, it's not impossible to do something like that anymore. I mean, Flash is still out there but, you know, who's using Flash for much of anything—which is unfortunate, in that, you know, HTML5 and JavaScript and the current state of CSS don't allow the kind of activity, the interactivity that you used to be able to do with that stuff, with Director and with Flash. And so there's a whole switch, I think, in how texts are going. So in some ways I don't think the piece will have influence because right now you can't make stuff like that anymore, or not without lot of struggles, um, to do something interactive. I mean, sure, you can do a video, and I could include sound now way easier, but—I'm just curious to see where texts in general go, and exploratory texts online, because certain avenues have been closed down for doing that work and I don't know if they'll come back. So in my free time, I've been thinking about, you know, what counts as exploratory these days and where that's going. And so, um, I don't know.

**Victor Vitanza**

How did composing "Bookling Monument" shape your work that followed?

**Anne Wysocki**

How did "Bookling Monument" shape my work that followed? Um, that piece lingered in my mind for a long time—the pleasures of working on it. I worked on it over a summer, um, with camera and, you know, playing with Director and scripting things. And as I went along and thought about what built from what pieces and what directions I should take and, um, thought about just what could follow and whose body parts I could use (poor Dennis), it just, it really lingered, the rich pleasure of it, but also the kinds of associative thinking that that piece allowed. And so I sometimes think that it pushed me toward being a bit more concrete in my writing, somewhat, and to think more associatively and to try to be a little looser in lines of logic. I still wanted when I write to have pieces that felt like a whole, you know, that feel satisfying and feel complete. But I think it loosened up, um, working in those associative ways, working online, working more with the logic of association. Um, it loosened things up in my head in a certain way and changed how I envisioned stuff.

**Victor Vitanza**

What is your position on curation? What concerns do you have about the de(grad)ation of digital texts?

**Anne Wysocki**

What's my position on curation? What concerns do I have about the degradation of digital texts? I guess I'm not concerned. I mean, I go back and there are things I made and you can't really look at them anymore, and occasionally, like, we have a store of old computers—we've given, you know, most of the old computers away. But every once in a while I'll open something up from way back when, like, to look at Hypercard or something. But, personally for my work, you know, it's not like I think my work is that important to worry over keeping. And in the long term the questions over temporality of text, I think, are healthy for us. You know, the fear of text disappearing—like, so what? We've dealt with all this stuff for centuries now and need to face up to, you know, our knowledge is what happened to get saved, um, or what we're able to interpret. You know, and the lessons we learn from like the decoding Mayan engravings and realizing, oh, those people were smart and they could think. I mean, I think it's good for us to have that stuff continue instead of thinking that everything has to be held onto and it has to last forever and something's wrong with us if we can't make stuff last and last and last. I mean, it's not like I want everything to get lost and I don't want a past, a usable and helpful past to disappear. But on the other hand, the anxiety over losing stuff, um, let it go. I mean, we are human and need to be reminded that we get old and crinkly and, um, this is how it is. And I breathe, get old, you know.

**Victor Vitanza**

What are you working on now?

**Anne Wysocki**

What am I working on now? Having time. Oh, man—in two weeks I'm retired from UWM, which is, like, one of the—hugely exciting, because of time, um, and having time again to play and to experiment and to work. I mean, there are just, there are a ton of things bubbling up right now, and I'm not sure which pieces I'll work on first. I mean, there's stuff I'm doing about aesthetics and bodies and rhetoric that I, you know, I've been working on in the background now for a couple of years and not really developed. And we'll see. I mean, I kind of dream about that stuff and things appear to me, um, you know in those nice hours in the morning when you're still not quite awake and the cat's standing on you trilling and saying "c'mon, let's play" and, you know, like, "what am I going to make?" And, um, so it's just going to be a question of time, how does it play out? I'm excited about it.