



# Word Hacking: Writing in Cyberspace

**Armin Medosch**

Editor's Note: *There has been much discussion on the Net, particularly on some of the international theory and culture lists, about the growing number of Englishes and/or Euro-Englishes emerging in cyber[text]space. Keeping this in mind, we publish the following essay in its original form. —M. A.*

There are people who say that through computers and multimedia the Gutenberg Galaxy is replaced by a world, where visual and auditive media are taking over and being used for storage of knowledge, for communication, for exchange of thought. Maybe they are right in the long term. But what I can see right now is not at all the vanishing of the written word but quite contradictory an explosion of writing in the networked universe of ascii. The Gutenberg Galaxy is reinvented in computerbased networks. But this reinvention also means that there is a shift in the use of "words." Written language is no longer the high cultural temple of Western Society in its classical phase with the attributes of well formed sentences, correct grammar and perfect spelling. It is becoming "oral," but it is still "typed" and it is "printed" to the "screen." One place where this happens is the "Internet." Communication via Email is much more chat style then within the classical format of the letter. On IRC this is even pushed further, where the extended alphabet of ascii is used to express emotion and action. And some of these emoticons are re-entering the realm of email and even of print. People who are not so familiar with these emoticons are at least able to produce a smiley. And despite the fact, that the WWW is a so called Graphical User Interface (GNU) its main content is consisting of words. More and more style conscious websites are tending away from "Iconmania" towards a word style user interface, offering menues through lists of words, creating word.gifs instead of clickable stupidness as offered by the operating system "Windows" with its many many pictograms whos meaningfulness consists of cheap analogies to the real world. So there was never more written word then now but this changed also the character of the word. It is becoming visual and emotional. The typeface (font) itself often is an artwork. This has been pushed to the limits by graphic designers like Neville Brody and David Carsson. But they are only the big guys on top of a wave of thousands of talented techno-party-flyer de-

signers, poster and t-shirt creators. There is an interesting recycling process going on. The way the word is treated in this flyer and website culture is inspired by the graphical language of dadaists and constructivists early in this century. They themselves were inspired by the upcoming language of advertising and boulevard press. The message became a collage of "found objects" in the form of headlines and slogans. And now this new culture of the written word is taken over again by the advertisement industries. You can see the freakiest typeface design advertising the most boring products like insurance and banking services.

***We can BE THE MESSAGE, with all the senses of our nervous system, with all the openings of our body translated into ascii.***

I consider myself as a writer. So maybe I should defend the printed book. I like books, they are really interactive, you can read them while riding the underground and you can read them in bed which can be a truly sexy experience. But I really welcome this new culture of writing in a non classical style. I think its a true challenge and a true chance too. Language becomes much more "primitive" (with a positive connotation). It is freed from the high cultural assets of overcorrectness in grammar and spelling. It is much more a simple tool then an overcomplex structure. Words can be used like toasters or can openers. You can throw them on sombodies head and collect the smithereens. Words are like individuals now. They are not so heavily defined. They can have many meanings. You can combine them and reconfigure them like pieces of DNA. And this might change the whole cultural DNA. I for example really like to read postmodern philosophy. But very often, for example when reading Deleuze /Guattari I get a certain sort of headache. I think I understand what they said and I like the message, but I dont like the style of the message. It is very complex, very hard to read. So automatically it is very elitist. Without a few years of studying philosophy or communication theory you are unable to understand all that latin words and french rationalist constructions. And older authors like Adorno are even worse. Even with my philosophy

studies in the background I simply cant read Adorno. The headache becomes so strong, I have to put on the record player. This guy really lived in another galaxy. So I prefer listening to KRS-One of Boogie Down Productions who is the better philosopher for the decade I live in. The philosophy has the chance of getting down on street level. PHILOSOPHY IS GROOVY! More people will understand it. It could become less complex in terms of intellectualism but more complex in other terms like associative character, spontaneity, social relevance. The "message" is a web of meaning functioning on different levels and not a hierarchical dogmatic thing. So writing is now something totally different. It can be like singing, rapping, screaming, crying, drawing, dancing. We can free ourselves from writing rationalist articles and leading boring discussions on "media art." We can BE THE MESSAGE, with all the senses of our nervous system, with all the openings of our body translated into ascii. Writing becomes like code breaking/word hacking. We can create our own language, our own visual metasigns, our hyroglyphs. We can stop being poets and can become poems instead. The cyberspace—this consensual hallucination of the nineties—is perfectly supporting this. The words are printed to the screen. From my screen to your screen and back. Time and space dont seem to exist. We can directly stimulate each others central nervous systems from cost to cost, from continent to continent. D/G said the book is a body without organs. Maybe I misunderstood everything, but I think the net is an organ without a body. The flesh has to be added by the users. And they will do it one or the other way: by giving their social identity, their data bodies to the commercial and governmental net reality and getting exploited by the virtual class, or by creating a multiversum of individual realities. In this multiverse each one has his own planet, but these planets are not organised in a Newton mechanist style. They are overlapping in time space and they all can have very similar names like "earth," "moon," "venus," "mars." Just do it!

*Armin Medosch is the Editor of the international net-culture journal Telepolis located at (<http://www.heise.de/tp>).*

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