

The Death of the author, the birth of the user:

Barthes, Borges and Rand

Foucault once claimed that the “ground is once again shifting under our feet” (Burke, 2004, Pg 193), a sentiment that appears particularly apt to our current technological age. The Web has not just greatly altered cultural practice, it also symbolises a momentous shift in our approach towards meaning.

In 1968, Roland Barthes famously wrote, “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” (Barthes, 1977, Pg 148). This dissertation will assess the relevance and overlap of Barthes, Jorge Luis Borges and Paul Rand to the World Wide Web. Despite different backgrounds and disciplines, each approaches the question of meaning, seeing the reader as central to the creative process. As shall be explored, the user’s creation of meaning is a foundational principle of the Web. From a literary perspective, it was during the Modernist movement that the reader was first seen to play a role in the formation of a text’s meaning. However, what makes the case of Barthes, Borges and Rand interesting is the degree to which they pursued audience engagement. All three faced the limitations of print media and so adopted innovative means of focusing their work to the reader. Neither Barthes, Borges or Rand lived to see mass implementation of the Web but unwittingly they were searching for the possibilities that hypermedia would allow.