

---

COURSE: Youth & Cyberculture S6 / Spring 2020

Prof. A. KHAYATI

## Handout 4

### Hypertext

" We must abandon conceptual systems founded upon ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity, and replace them with ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks. Almost all parties to this paradigm shift, which marks a revolution in human thought, see electronic writing as a direct response to the strengths and weaknesses of the printed book. This response has profound implications for literature, education, and politics."

*Hypertext*, George Landow

"Just as cyborgs integrate a variety of technological prostheses in order to constitute their own subjectivities, hypertext writing allows both reader and writer to weave their own meanings from a set of disparate textual elements. Hypertext, as a literal embodiment not only of postmodern fragmentation but also its possible resolution, repeats the cyborg paradigm on a textual, narrative level."

-- Diane Greco, *Cyborgs among Us: Bodies and Hypertext*

### Hypertext

Hypertext is text displayed on a computer display or other electronic devices with references (hyperlinks) to other text that the reader can immediately access. Hypertext documents are interconnected by hyperlinks, which are typically activated by a mouse click, keypress set or by touching the screen.

Apart from text, the term "hypertext" is also sometimes used to describe tables, images, and other presentational content formats with integrated hyperlinks. Hypertext is one of the key underlying concepts of the World Wide Web, where Web pages are often written in the Hypertext Markup Language (HTML).

#### QUALITIES OF HYPERTEXT:

**NON-LINEAR:** the hypertextual environment allows for the non-linear progression of ideas, in which the reader follows his or her interest, rather than being guided by the author from start to finish.

**MULTIVOCALITY:** Supplementary texts, footnotes, texts that in book form would exist physically isolated from supplementary texts, can be physically implanted in the network of texts. By linking many texts together and leaving it to the reader to choose a path through various texts with varied writers, many different voices are heard and so multivocality is established. Also, the ability to link heavily referential texts to their references makes them more accessible to the non-scholar.

**WRITER-TO-READER SHIFTS:** Hypertext shifts power to the reader and away from the writer. non-linearity, multivocality, the melding of the functions of reading and writing when readers and writers are offered the same environment all serve to engage a more active reader. Some programs offer the reader the same environment as the 'author'- such that the reader can append and link their own comments, additions, to the text, in such a way that there is no distinction or boundary between the original text and the additions, thus shifting and blurring the boundary between reader and writer.

**DECENTERED:** A hypertextual text has no fixed center; rather, its center keeps shifting as the reader pursues various links and trains of thought.

In short, hypertext signifies a change from linear, structured and hierarchical forms of representing and understanding the world into fractured, decentralized and changeable media based on the technological concept of hyperlinks.

#### Hypertext Fiction

**Hypertext fiction** is a genre of electronic literature (literary works created exclusively on and for digital devices, such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones), characterized by the use of hypertext links that provide a new context for non-linearity in literature and reader interaction. The reader typically chooses links to move from one node of text to the next, and in this fashion arranges a story from a deeper pool of potential stories. Its spirit can also be seen in interactive fiction.

Hypertext writing has developed its own style of fiction, coinciding with the growth and proliferation of hypertext development software and the emergence of electronic networks. Two software programs specifically designed for literary hypertext, **Storyspace** and **Intermedia** became available in the 1990s.

*Patchwork Girl* (1995) is a work of electronic literature by American author Shelley Jackson. It was written in Storyspace (a software program for creating, editing, and reading hypertext fiction). It is often discussed along with Michael Joyce's *afternoon, a story* (1987) as an important work of hypertext fiction.