
Hypertext and Empire

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ABSTRACT

This paper asks what sort of world is anticipated by the hyperlink. An answer is sought in observation of hypertext readers and in the theorization of 'e-motion' as combined hyperlink activation and receptive disposition on the part of the reader. It is suggested that hyperlinking's overarching disposition is towards a world of multiple productivities and productive multiplicities (anti-Empire).

KEYWORDS

hypertext, hyperlink, Empire, transcoding, reception, reading, multitude

INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns hypertext stories, both factual and fictional, but not hypertext manuals, scientific or technical material. It is interested in the 'wished for worlds' beyond the hypertext narrative, but not in the sense of virtual worlds that are hypertextually imagined; rather, the wishing is done in the act of hyperlinking itself and this act is read politically here.

It is an act that, I will argue, has an inherent 'receptive disposition' towards a wished for world whose multitudinous inhabitants are predisposed to resist any single logic (where 'logic' is used in Deleuze's sense of that which establishes the relations between thinking and life [1]). This disposition gets endlessly redirected into the specific textual destinations of each particular hypertext node, but the ongoing experience of hyperlinking per se remains capable of endlessly re-invoking it.

WATCHING STUDENTS

Teaching a new course on hypertext practice and theory this year I found myself spending a great deal of time simply watching students as they read hypertexts. The focus of the course was on hypertext fiction and hypertext journalism - on those two different conceptions of the story - with a common core of work on the technicalities of web-based hypertext construction, including use of the Connection Muse [2] method for making adaptive hypertexts. But in between the

bursts of lecturing activity and lab-based instruction, in the interstices when the students were working away at something, I realised that I was watching them more and more closely as they dealt with those other interstices - the spaces across which they were struggling to make their connections, whether as readers or authors. These are the defining elastic spaces of hypertext, where both producers and readership have to solve the problem of how best to cross the bridge that is the hyperlink. The following discussion of this activity, which proceeds from observation to Jauss's ideas about reception, will seem like a digression; but there is something here about the individualistic nature of what is going on that I want to set up for later in the paper.

So I began to try reading the students' body language and expressions as they 'navigated' this or that hypertext, while figuring out whether the links they were 'writing' or 'mapping' for their own hypertexts worked as intended. None of those metaphors for hyperlink handling - especially not navigating - seemed up to the task of capturing the complex range of things that appeared to be going on with these readers' bodies. There were those who visibly rushed in to a new hypertext, clicking with abandon until they hit the brick wall of utter frustration that nothing was making sense any more (hunched forward, unblinking stares followed by physically drawing back, alarm or disappointment or just boredom on their faces, then the glance around the room to see if anybody else looked any more engaged). There were the much more tentative explorers, whose every click looked like a first step out onto a flimsy rope bridge; their expressions of self reassurance at each stage seeming often little more than the relief that comes from stepping back off the swaying bridge at the other end. They would sit back with momentary relief as each link destination materialised with as much apparent solidity as the textual place they had just come from, before leaning back into it again and then, after a while, tensing for the next big step into the unknown. But there were also those whose hovering mouse hands and expressions of concentration at the moments of hyperlink choice seemed to betray a real decision-making process: what am I anticipating if I go in this direction? what do I want from this moment of choice? what is the text offering me here? And, with the choice executed, their range of expressions then often reinforced this interpretation: they might

visibly brighten with interest or pleasure, their anticipations met, or they might jerk their heads back with surprise or frustration that the destination seemed arbitrary or at least unsatisfactorily integrated with the reading experience they thought they were having.

Other factors, not unexpectedly, criss-crossed this tableau of responses. A group of female students who had previously taken a colleague's course called 'Representation and Gender' took to Shelley Jackson's Patchwork Girl [3] with almost immediate ease and enthusiasm and remained enthralled by it; all the difficulty of a first encounter with hypertextual form fading into the background behind an openly displayed sense from these young women that they 'got' what Jackson was doing and enjoyed it. (It's about the making of the gendered body as an assemblage, a sutured text, Frankenstein-fashion.) A Masters student on another of my courses, a professional journalist, had produced a piece of hypertext journalism about the Recak massacre in Kosovo in January 1999. He had based it around two completely different, indeed mutually exclusive, interpretations of the event that had appeared within days of the alleged massacre: Chris Bird's superbly crafted story in The Observer newspaper in the UK, and Renaud Girard's masterly analysis of detail in Le Figaro, one telling of a Serb massacre, the other of a Kosovo Liberation Army deception [4]. Two good, 'objective' journalists had produced two important stories about the Recak event. Only one of them could be right. The Masters student's hypertext dramatised this problem by building a hypertext around the points in the story where interpretations diverged. When this was presented to the undergraduate class, among the range of fictional and journalistic hypertexts they were studying, most were reassured as readers by the clear justification in this case for the hypertext form. As readers, they understood rapidly what to expect from each hyperlink - an alternative reading of the details - and worked their way fairly effortlessly through what was none the less still quite a complex structure of material. So at least these two things lubricated the first encounters with hypertext: a prior set of ideas - a theoretical schema if you will, outside the realm of hypertext theory per se - that 'explained' why hypertext was an appropriate form for some specific content; and, more simply, a problem of contested readings (preferably reducible to either/or choices) that motivated the hyperlink structure. Without this sort of anchorage -

providing a straightforward answer to the question 'why hypertext?' - most readers displayed various versions at various times from the tableau of responses described above.

LOVING (IN)COHERENCE

So what? Well, sitting watching these students, I wanted to know more about what such readers were experiencing in the non-place of the hyperlink, in the instants immediately after leaving some piece of textual ground and before arriving at another. Although over so quickly as to be barely noticed in each instance of hyperlinking, a large hypertext provides so many such instances that, taken together, they must constitute a significant non-place in which a meaningfully large part of the overall experience of reading the hypertext takes place. I had already imagined this as a shaky rope bridge in some instances. Now I began to see the bridge in thick fog, with promontories of land dimly visibly at each end, crashing waves audible far below, waiting to smash all sense of coherent meaning like the flotsam of wooden crates splintered against rocks, should one fall from the bridge. Then again, the non-place of the hyperlink took on something of the appearance of heaven from Michael Powell's A Matter of Life and Death, a place of dreamy uncertainty from where a return could only be effected by arguing the case, courtroom fashion. Jerked out of such reveries by the end of each class, the problem of understanding the location and experiencing of the hyperlink remained...

I have been playing elderly Infocom text adventures on my Handspring PDA this year; games such as The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy that I had first played over twenty years ago on the green glow of old DOS screens and then forgotten about. Now, thanks to the portability of the original Z-Machine (a cross-platform virtual machine designed by Infocom in 1979, which requires a platform-specific interpreter or Z-Machine emulator such as PalmPilotFrotz), these games have a cult following among PDA users. Not hypertexts in the contemporary sense, the Infocom text adventures do still generate a sort of hypertextual reading experience as each keyed-in instruction from the reader/gamer ('look under bed') generates a different response. The point and pleasure of the game, of course, is that there is only one way for it all to fit together and each choice-point has been turned into a puzzle. In Hitchhiker, novice readers often get stuck early on, in a lift with a Babel fish that's too slippery to catch and stick in your

ear. The point is that these text adventures put you into the same non-place as hypertext links do, but often for much longer as you struggle to solve the problem that will move you on to the next part of the story. What makes the reading easy and the pleasure accessible all the time, however, is the knowledge that there is a right way to move the story along. Indeed the stronger this conviction the more the text can frustrate the reader with bizarre and intricate problems that block progress: the reader knows that there is definite progress to be made - that the one proper story, one order, is there to be reactivated after each moment of choice and challenge. So my Handspring PDA pops out of my pocket all the time as a private little portal into a pseudo-hypertextual experience that feels interactive and stimulating without the risk posed by 'real' hypertexts - that the story will get lost, meaning go undiscovered, smashed to pieces beneath the bridge of the hyperlink and washed away in the churning surf.

This reminded me of the scene in Mark Danielewski's multi-layered *House of Leaves* [5] when Mark responds to his father's hospitalisation with cancer by writing a story that not too subtly encodes their relationship in fictional terms. Mark's father reads it, responds badly and Mark tears the story up in distress and anger, depositing the fragments in a dumpster and determining to abandon his career as an author. His sister invites him to dinner some time later and presents him with the salvaged manuscript, taped lovingly back into a coherent whole. Around that act of recovery, *House of Leaves* builds its whole elaborate contrivance of textual layers, the 'hyperlinks' achieved in book form via typographic invention, multi-levelled footnoting, annotations, mark-ups and page design, centred around a house full of scribblings and two superimposed investigations of the stories those scribblings tell. At its heart, however, remains that vital principle of the book - that there is a story, a larger order, to be held together from the fragments. I had a PhD student a few years ago who also tried to throw it all away by tearing up his work after three years and tossing it in a waste bin in the university. His Japanese girlfriend searched dozens of bins on campus, rescued it all, cleared the furniture off her floor to have enough room to work, and reassembled everything over several weeks, barely sleeping. She brought me a thick file containing as much sticky tape as paper; hundreds of often tiny pieces taped carefully together. She couldn't take it to

him or he would have destroyed it again, more thoroughly this time. How we reintroduced this rescued text into his life is another story. At the time I locked my office door and wept quietly over it, wrenched as much by what she had done as by his reasons for throwing it away.

So, *sometimes*, when I write my own hypertexts, read others', or teach students to both read and write them, I feel I have betrayed that young Japanese woman's faith in order, in the unfragmented text, and the love she put into transforming the awful hypertext on her littered floor back into something more honestly and believably coherent. Perhaps we need to be more careful about assuming that hypertext is not a betrayal of some hard-won coherence; that we are not simply acting petulantly as writers when we tear up our texts because we can; that our expectations of our readers are not that they should be like that Japanese woman, down on her hands and knees, retrieving meaning that we have walked away from. And if we have generated these fragments out of digerati's cleverness, rather than simple anger or despair, then we may be doubly guilty. If there is a love of incoherence somewhere - a parallel universe's equivalent of the love of coherence in ours - it may be something altogether less cavalier than our tendency to do hypertexts just because we can.

There is a key difference that gets us off this hook, partially. We are *hyperlink* authors, not just hypertext authors. We 'write' the connections, although quite what sort of writing that actually is remains at times ill defined and only dimly understood. We follow the Connection Muse, if we might be permitted to use the name of that bit of useful programming in a more general sense, to evoke the project of deliberately opening up the non-place of the hyperlink as the space of connection and of conceiving connection in new ways. But we are only off the hook if we do this work properly and figure out why we want new kinds of connection and how we are going to achieve them in practice. In large measure, this entails understanding the experiencing of connection on the part of the reader, the dynamic movement of experienced interconnection, the subtle play of interruption and linkage, above all the sense of semiotic motion involved. More precisely, I want to argue for a reception theory of hypertextual connection capable of addressing these things. A good survey of the relevant early research literature here is provided by Patricia Wright's chapter 'To Jump or Not to Jump:

Strategy Selection While Reading Electronic Texts' in McKnight et al [6]. Wright's assessment of factors influencing the 'willingness to jump' has not yet been bettered, but it is her final thought that I want to return to – the idea that models of reading may need to be integrated with other models (of attention, memory, motor skills, etc.) in order to understand hyperlinking, even though 'as yet it is not obvious that these models can accommodate what is known about the strategic choices made by hypertext readers' [7]. Reception theory may allow us to think our way out of this uncertainty.

RECEPTIVE DISPOSITIONS

Hans Robert Jauss, influential proponent of reception theory within German literary circles (who died in 1997), once reportedly noted that, for English speakers, the word 'reception' probably carried stronger connotations of the hotel check-in than of cultural forms. Ironically, the hotel reception desk may no longer be an entirely inappropriate connotation in the world of hypertext. Is each hyperlink perhaps a 'reception' of sorts where the reader may obtain the electronic key to one of many rooms, located along the intersecting web of corridors? In the tradition of reception theory that developed around Jauss and others, *Rezeption* was distinguished from *Wirkung* (effect or impact) by being focused clearly on the reader's experiencing of the text, rather than merely on some end effect. While sharing much with the more diverse and internationally dispersed work sometimes clustered under the umbrella of reader-response criticism, German reception theory was more self-consciously developed as a school of thought and, as such, is more readily explained in relation to specific social and intellectual circumstances in Germany in the last three decades of the twentieth century (reception theory is rooted in work done in the 1970s). Robert Holub [8] provided the first detailed discussion and explanation in English of reception theory's social and cultural context. He identified 'a more questioning attitude in West Germany towards systemic and institutional structures', the maturation of the first 'post-Nazi' generation and 'the recognition that West Germany was part of an "imperialist" coalition' [9]. Against that background, the turn to reception theory was more than a response to outdated modes of literary study and to the claims of the non-canonical in the form of mass media and popular literature - it was also the encoding, as what Jauss termed 'primary aesthetic experience', of the

impulses, desires, pleasures of the social multitude, the people.

This led Jauss, among others, to various attempts at identifying the interactional patterns of aesthetic experience (for the entirety of which the term reception often stood). What I want to take, in particular, from this work is the notion of 'receptive dispositions'. For example, where the 'modality of identification' with a character in a story is 'cathartic', a specific 'reference' within a narrative may describe or show a hard-pressed hero enduring some pratfall. The reader's 'receptive disposition' is here 'sympathetic laughter/comic inner release' [10]. Where many reception theorists tried to be exhaustively precise about these interactional patterns across a range of closely described narratives, it remains possible to extract the notion of a receptive disposition at key narrative moments and ask how they might work in relation to hypertext.

In relation to non-hypertextual stories - whether fictional or journalistic - the work of the reception theorists has sensitised us to the constant complex play of receptive dispositions through the text, moment by moment. The good writer has always developed a know-how about shaping and influencing these dispositions but in a sense she has not needed to think about them too explicitly, because in non-hypertextual forms the effective cueing of dispositions is often a by-product of things that the writer *is* consciously working to control - stylistic continuity, narrative structure, character development, descriptive continuity, etc. Where such things are held together by the overarching imperative of linear continuity, the reader's receptive dispositions will, in a sense, take care of themselves. Once that imperative is removed, however, as it is, broadly speaking, with hypertext, receptive dispositions may necessarily join the toolkit of the writer as things to be consciously shaped and directed, especially where alternative dispositions are required.

The reason for this may not be immediately apparent. But think for a moment about what many of the dispositions in a hypertext have to be receptive dispositions towards. They have to be dispositions towards possible destinations of a hyperlink. The difficulties I was reading in the body language of my students above, as they struggled with hypertexts, were in part difficulties with their own receptive dispositions at each hypertextual moment of the text in question.

To explore this insight, I contrived for my students an experiment in hypertext adaptation of a suspense story, *Crime of Passion* by Richard Chizmar [11]. The first three paragraphs of the story set up the immediate situation: a writer gets out of bed at the sound of intruders outside his cabin. The tension builds quickly. He realises they are going to burn his cabin. He reaches for his gun... . At this point the author 'cuts away', as it were, to four paragraphs of background. A momentary frustration on the part of the reader is allayed by the presence in the peripheral field of vision of nearby paragraphs that have clearly returned to the scene of the attack. Indeed the delay is teasingly pleasurable in its own way precisely because we know it will be brief. The background paragraphs proved to be full of hypertextual possibilities, many of them potentially fascinating in their own right. Why had he never dated the same woman twice? etc. However, in actually adapting this story to the hypertext form, the students produced unbearable hypertext narratives that, in some cases, were actually capable of angering readers as they pounded away at the mouse button trying to find the main thread of action where all the real excitement was - or so readers were *disposed* to think. No matter how interesting or exciting any of the other threads were made to be, there was a receptive disposition towards what was perceived to be the main thread - the one set up by the opening paragraph - which readers felt compelled to follow. Given the dispositional power of the first paragraph, it seemed almost impossible to construct a hypertext that did not thwart this disposition just by being a hypertext. An interesting incidental observation is that a cinematic playing out of the opening scene seemed to be running in many reader's heads and the available filmic punctuation of cutaways and flashbacks could not support a full hypertextual realisation, could not prevent the reader from expecting the imagined next scene in the visual flow of the narrative to build cinematically (not hypertextually) on the previous scene.

Of course this was an experiment to explore whether a given opening, with strong dispositional effects, could be transcended and extended in hypertext terms. The proponent of hypertext could justifiably argue that writing such a dispositionally specific first scene would be bad hypertext writing. But my point is merely to reinforce the idea that receptive dispositions exist and that they really matter.

Beyond this, however, we need to consider whether receptive dispositions take a different experiential form in the act of hyperlinking. In non-hypertextual stories the dispositions are responses to the text rather than combined responses and actions. The moment of sympathetic laughter at/with a character is not accompanied by the action of following a hyperlink, for instance. (This is why Wright thought that models of 'motor skills' might be involved too.) Where receptive dispositions occur at - and inform the 'reading' of - a hyperlink, on the other hand, we have something more than a disposition in the sense intended by Jauss. Perhaps more than a little facetiously but in the interests of having a working terminology here, I propose to coin the term *e-motion* to refer to the combination of a receptive disposition and the triggering of a hyperlink (which is then only minimally a matter of motor skills). The term *e-motion* is meant to include a connotation of physical movement as well as of cognitive engagement informed by a disposition - both motion and emotion. Too clever perhaps, in a pejorative sense, to be seriously adopted, the coinage shall still be useful in developing the argument that follows.

Before pursuing this line of argument, however, I want to note one further aspect of my casual observing of students working with hypertexts - the unremittingly individualistic nature of what they were engaged in. The realization that this was so came as rather a shock, I must confess, even though it is so obvious. So much of what we might term internet culture is about reconfiguring social relations based on new forms of connection, new prototypes of community (from web chat to mobile phone, from e-bay to peer to peer file sharing) that hypertext's celebration of the isolated individual going his or her own way as ultimate sense-maker looks suddenly out of kilter. When there is a text for every hypertext reader, based on his or her choices, the sense of a shared reading experience is minimal. The required disposition seems to verge on possessive individualism of the sort critiqued by Marx, where in this instance the reader is 'proprietor of his own person' as reader (the borrowed phrase is Macpherson's) and owes nothing to a 'society' of readers who share the same text [12]. The individual reader seeks to 'possess' a unique reading experience as the very point of hypertext. For this reason there seemed no comfortable place for hypertext within my students' affection for the reconfigured

social connectivities of internet culture. In short, hypertext isolated them. I will speculate later in this paper, though, that this is a return to individualism as a post-virtual recognition of the necessity of transcending that isolation.

THEORISING E-MOTION (SIC)

I might usefully signpost the approaching argument at this point: I am going to contend that e-motions (combined hyperlink following and receptive dispositions) are the new factor that hypertext brings to reading; that e-motion as an abstract phenomenon (technological, cultural, social) transcodes something else (the something that transcends possessive individualism); and that when we recognise this 'something else' it will reflect back onto hypertext its own status as something desirable but practically limited in attainability. What is possessed through the hyperlink is not one's own in the end. In short, we will see that hypertext is an analogon - or formal mediation of - a 'wished for world' and a form of social connection and action yet to be fully realised. The isolating effect of hypertext reading is where we find the demand for new social connections transcoded in the hyperlink itself as an abstract phenomenon, a promise... This will be a reading of hypertextual form along the lines of Fredric Jameson's readings of other cultural forms as analogons of social and historical realities. Why hypertext? Why now? Because it makes concrete things that otherwise are virtually impossible to grasp; the same things, I will argue, that Hardt and Negri attempt to grasp theoretically in their term 'multitude' [13]. E-motions are the coded actions of a multitude that does not yet fully know of its own existence, does not know that it can act. They are footprints left behind or perhaps merely the shadows cast as multitude passes by at this particular moment in time; evoking productive multiplicities and multiple productivities as the enticing characteristics of a wished for world.

There will be many other traces of multitude in our cultural lives. As Jameson's work reminds us, the significance in a world-historical sense of the realities transcoded into cultural forms is not necessarily matched by any significance that the cultural imprint itself may have: with Wright's help he saw profound changes in the technocratic nature of the modern world transcoded into Western movies, or of the underside of multinational capital in Al Pacino's performance in *Dog Day Afternoon* [14]. Put more directly, then, hyperlinking is one

cultural response to Empire, an emergent form in the 'political unconscious' of contemporary culture that gives a shape to something repressed, to multitude. If multitude is the emergent subject of postmodernity then e-motions are that subject's action in the concrete realm of story. A square of opposition will help situate this claim (see Fig.1).

Fredric Jameson has been the most consistent and interesting user of the square of opposition in recent years, at least in cultural studies. He has used it to underpin a political reading of the film *Dog Day Afternoon* (by mapping the oppositional relationships of social classes onto characters, performances and narrative relationships); more generally to give body to the notion of contradiction in his influential book *The Political Unconscious* (where it unpacks the logical permutations through which contradictions otherwise too densely packed to be thinkable and expressible become culturally accessible)[15]; and, more generally still, in his extraordinary essay 'The Existence of Italy' [16], to organise the terms realism, modernism and postmodernism in such a way as to invite consideration of a fourth term, as yet unnamed. We will have reason to return to that fourth term, and to the argument of that essay, in due course. But first I want to set out more clearly the separate things that the remainder of this paper seeks to link.

There is the idea of contradiction, handled here through the square of opposition as used by Jameson. There is the notion of multitude, as evoked by Hardt and Negri in *Empire*. There is the powerful idea of remediation, familiar now from Bolter and Grusin's eponymous book, subtitled 'Understanding New Media' [17], as well as from Bolter's seminal study of the remediation of print [18]. And there is the idea of hypertext itself, which informs a growing range of practices in different fields.

I want to further the work of linking these things by suggesting that contradiction can be interestingly inserted into remediation. Let's remind ourselves of what remediation means. It is, generally speaking, that process through which media 'define themselves by borrowing from, paying homage to, critiquing, and refashioning their predecessors' [19]. So photography remediates perspective painting, TV remediates film and radio, hypertext remediates print, the web remediates just about every previous medium, including the telegraph, and so on. This is a useful

way of thinking about the media of public communication, not least because it keeps us well away from any simplistic notions of a radical break or transformation from one medium to another, which seems not in any case to be how a public comprehends its own relationship to such things. In the hands of Bolter and Grusin it also leads to many helpful insights about the complex technical and aesthetic relationships that have operated among the various media. And it informs their pursuit of a third way between technological determinism and the determining of technology by social forces.

But if we think for a moment about Hegel's chicken, instead of the photograph or the computer game, we may discover a reason to introduce a stronger concept of contradiction into this process of remediation. Put bluntly, in what way does the chicken 'remediate' the egg? The Hegelian perspective is not that the egg simply develops into the chicken in some straightforward manner, but that the egg is 'contradictory' in the sense that it already contains the not-egg or negation-of-egg that will replace - or 'remediate' - it. So, to a good Hegelian Marxist, the 'remediation' of feudalism by bourgeois society was not a process of natural development but a working out of feudalism's contradictions. Rather than dwelling on the philosophical issues here, however, the question we want to ask is this: in what sense can remediation be thought of as involving the idea that a medium is already contradictory with itself? Further, it becomes possible to argue that the refashioning involved is at least in part a working out of these contradictions. (So perhaps hypertext will be where 'new media' are most contradictory to themselves?)

If you like, what is proposed here is a 'hard' version of remediation to set alongside Bolter and Grusin's 'soft' version. Where the latter decomposes rather readily into borrowings, homage, critiques and refashionings, the 'hard' version says that there may be something more structurally definable going on. Now, to approach that 'something more structurally definable', I want to return to what is perhaps this paper's most deliberately provocative assertion. Hyperlinking transcodes multitude. To give some sense to this assertion, we need to backtrack with all three words into the thickets from which they've emerged. We have done some of this already with hyperlinking in the first half of this paper (and 'discovered' the notion of combined receptive dispositions and hyperlink

following that we have called e-motion). Next is 'transcodes'.

In Jameson's work, the term transcoding often replaces the term mediation, because the latter is burdened with too much complexity, with the messiness of unresolved debates, with too many misleading connotations. Where in one sense mediation is what allows history to stand in relation to people as fruit stands in relation to bananas and pears - that is as the very ground of their differences from each other - it is also a term tainted by overly crude questions of determinism (do bananas make fruitiness, but not in circumstances of their own choosing?). So (with the help of a foreground/background metaphor) transcoding is useful as a more neutrally descriptive term for just this process: the analysis of foreground cultural phenomena and background realities through recognising the formal embodiment of the latter in (not necessarily the determination of) the former. But like the chicken embodied in the egg's contradiction to itself, this 'formal embodiment' may only be graspable as an unpacking of the logical permutations that arise around the contradictions in that background reality. In other words, our foreground phenomenon will never be a picture of that reality in any straightforward sense (there's no picture of the Hegelian chicken in the egg). Rather, what we are looking for at best is some sort of 'picture' of unpacked contradiction. For Jameson, mapping or projecting the stuff of culture onto the square of opposition has been a very handy device for realising this sort of picture.

With this in mind, what happens when we insert the idea of contradiction into the concept of remediation? What contradiction seeds each medium with that which will, in due course, remediate it? A prime suspect in this, fairly obviously, is representation. This is hardly the place to rehearse the whole troubled history of representation as a problem, even if we confined ourselves to the media of the last hundred years and ignored the long saga - indeed in many ways the defining narrative - of human cultures' struggle with our representational needs. But that's the point. Precisely because this has been such a huge problem, it delivers itself time and again into the heart and soul of each new medium as that which will not be solved. In short, the insoluble paradox of representation (Magritte's 'This is Not A Pipe') is the contradiction at the centre of remediation as an endless process. To see where we are

at any particular point in that process - to recognise our own specific configuration of technical and aesthetic responses - the best we can do is to unpack that contradiction into its logical permutations and then cast the stuff of today's cultural practices and content like so many actors playing out those permutations as roles on a stage. Jameson helps us with this in 'The Existence of Italy' (the essay's title evoking the problem of representation via Adorno and Horkheimer's 'Not Italy is offered, but proof that it exists').

Remediation then becomes, in part, our movement through the space of unpacked contradiction figured by Jameson, where more than one 'position' exerts a simultaneous pull on our representational aspirations. From the realism of the early photograph to the postmodernism of video, the modernism of European art cinema to the virtuality of the computer game, each medium has not merely refashioned the preceding but has inherited the play of possibilities and tensions, denials and commitments, that arise inevitably as the insoluble problem of representation bequeaths its legacy. Indeed this bequest is there in every medium from the start as an invitation to remediation. And the bequest leads, at any one point in cultural history, to the transcoding of that unpacked contradiction into actual, contemporary manifestations. We should certainly look for them now, amidst the stuff of digital arts and culture.

In a modified version of the square of opposition (Fig. 1 below) I have replaced the founding term 'truth' in Jameson's schema with its great twin in post-Enlightenment rationality - 'individualism' (the object sought by the geographer with the geographer himself, from Vermeer's *The Geographer*, reproduced on the cover of the paperback edition of *Signatures of the Visible*). And what has also been added in this modification of Jameson's schema is an occupant for the position of the fourth term (marked by a question mark on page 161 of 'The Existence of Italy'). It is virtuality itself, suggested even by Jameson's original version where the fourth term sits between truth/representation and anti-art: surely the very place of the virtual where reality is simulated by art?

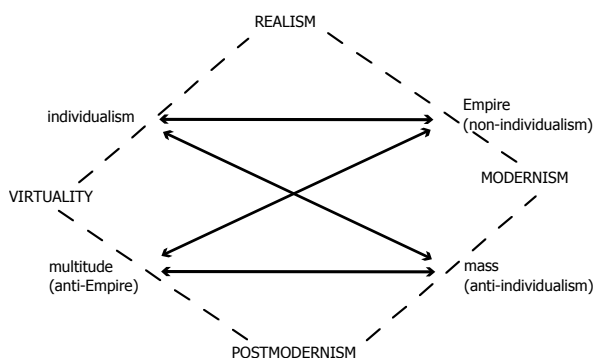


Figure 1: adapted from Jameson 1992, p.161

What suddenly comes into view here is the position of multitude, understood in exactly the terms used by Hardt and Negri as a flipping over of a previously (Hobbesian) pejorative term to discover its positive side and as a movement beyond its fragmentation by class structures towards a new, dimly perceived unity. Post-rabble, post-mob, multitude counterbalances the individualism of 'citizen' with the notion of an emergent subject that draws the affective dimension out of 'mass' - the desire - while resisting the complicity of that desire, those masses, in the limitless universal order of Empire, the postmodern global inheritor of the imperialist projects that made the modern world: 'The multitude is the real productive force of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives off the vitality of the multitude' [20].

So on the way between the postmodern and the virtual, themselves merely markers of the unpacked contradiction that is representation, hypertext discovers its relationship with multitude: or, more precisely, the form of action actualised by the hyperlink (what I have rather playfully termed e-motion) is revealed as an analogon in the cultural realm of a form of action appropriate to multitude in the social realm. The task of e-motion, as combined hyperlink activation and receptive disposition, is the echo, in the world of reading and writing, of this task in the social world: 'constructing, in the non-place, a new place; constructing ontologically new determinations of the human, of living' [21] achieved through 'the set of powers to act (being, loving, transforming, creating) that reside in the multitude' [22]. I can't help but think of the young Japanese woman saving her lover's accidental hypertext spread out on her floor. Now Hardt and Negri would remind us that multitude and Empire are not set against each other like opposed protagonists; rather multitude is the

productive contradiction within Empire (our figure merely unpacks that contradiction to make it representable). But the point here is not to pursue such theorising further, merely to note that our coinage, e-motion as the reader's dispositional experiencing of the hyperlink, can be thought of as one more moment of friction in the multitude's abrasion of the 'smooth world' of Empire, one more coded form for the pleasure of interrupting the smooth flows of global culture.

LOOKING FOR LINKS

Deliberately grandiloquent, pretentious, hyperbolic, dependent on a coinage (e-motion) that I only take half seriously myself, the second half of this paper seems far removed from the first, from the observations of students struggling with hypertexts. But the hyperlinks that I imagine bridging these two levels depend on your sharing a receptive disposition that we have not worked into place yet.

In what sense, then, might e-motion, as the reader's realisation of receptive dispositions in the action of hyperlinking, be both a practical act in reading hypertext and an action that transcodes, albeit at a fairly modest level, the productivity of multitude? This is easier to swallow when we remind ourselves that the society of the spectacle transcoded in the forms of 'reading' characteristic of mass media (e.g. the gaze) the particular balance of Empire and mass that was among the late twentieth century's defining characteristics. The viewer of those untouchable image screens from a respectful distance, cinema screens, TV screens, giant advertising screens in public places, transcoded in the act of collective spectatorship the reality of the consumerist mass as a social formation. From reading to spectatorship to e-motion, then, is the continuing trajectory of aesthetic responses to the contradiction of representation as it moves us towards the condition of virtuality. If, though, such statements are not merely to join the pantheon of cultural studies' quotable and risible excesses, we have to find the link back to those actual hypertext readers in my classroom - lost in their individual efforts to possess meaning or even find a truth.

We find it, at first theoretically, by pushing on to where we recognise virtuality's delicate balance with realism, where individualism shakily resurfaces, as Hardt and Negri remind us, in the protection of a specifically located subjectivity from other places where subjectivity may be formed ('in the convent one is normally safe from

the apparatus of the family, at home one is normally out of reach of factory discipline', [23]). This delimitation of particular sites for the production of subjectivity tends to produce the individual in stable forms, i.e. individualism, or the subject as recognised by him and herself via others (nun, son, welder). As we anticipate a return to this point in the circuit, an inevitable return because virtuality is no more the ultimate solution to the contradiction of representation than were realism, modernism or postmodernism, we find - again as Hardt and Negri point out - that the enclosure of relatively fixed subjectivities is breaking down (as convent, family, home, factory, etc. are transformed into more open spaces, criss-crossed now by larger flows of power, meaning and identity, such as when 'family values' are evoked where there is no family as such). If multitude is the collective subject becoming visible somewhere between postmodernism and virtuality, hypertext exists both there and somewhere between virtuality and realism, where individual readers experience its central problem - the problem of 'truth', which was Jameson's original inhabitant - or instantiation - of this point in the circuit. It is the point where 'conviction of the possibility of aesthetic knowledge' appears [24]. Is this then the overarching imperative of receptive dispositions towards moments in a story, that representational knowledge should be obtainable, that the reader's sympathetic laughter at the hard-pressed hero should deliver a furtherance of representational knowledge about him and his world? If so, then the difference this time round is that the problem of 'truth' is no longer enclosed in truth guaranteeing institutions, whether church, school, court, or high culture, but is as dispersed across the social terrain as are the problems of 'family values' or 'discipline' or 'faith'.

So I want to argue that the individual readers and writers of hypertext in my classroom are confronted by this newly dispersed, generalised, now unconfined problem too, every time they activate a hyperlink: what is the nature of this hyperlink's truth claim? This is the problem faced by the viewers of the DVD version of Mike Figgis' *Timecode* (2000) as well, as they 're-focus' the audio track on one of four screens at any one time: which option will deliver most knowledge about what is going on? In a fundamental sense this taps into *the* problem of the digital, most visible in rising uncertainty, even panic in some quarters, about the digital photograph's status. In Britain the

National Union of Journalists' Digital Media Working Group is looking to define the 'minimum prominence for a "health warning" on manipulated images' [25]. In February 1999 the Dallas Morning News ran an item by its assistant managing editor who observed: 'Digital manipulation of photographs can be like a narcotic: Can we ever get enough? Editors and designers start looking at images with manipulation in mind' [26]. The same, now legendary, examples often get quoted when journalists discuss this issue: National Geographic moving a pyramid; the Pulitzer winning coverage of the 1984 Olympics in a US newspaper where every outdoor photograph had a blue sky added. Once requiring the expensive Scitex system, such manipulations are now done, of course, with Photoshop on the desktop. Add now, to the examples quoted, the Nelly Furtado and Kate Winslet incidents with men's magazines FHM and GQ respectively, where the former got a new midriff and the latter new legs. Or the dead US soldier in Somalia, being dragged through the streets, whose dangling genitals were digitally covered before Paul Watson's photograph ran in Time. Many newspapers and news magazines are piloting in-house digital manipulation guidelines for photographs but no clear standards have yet emerged. It's a bit like a family deciding that redeye removal is OK but that removing an unwanted relative from family snapshots is unacceptable - it's difficult to define the line clearly enough except on a case by case basis.

Hypertext's version of this problem might occur when fact and fiction are blurred - hyperlinking fictional story material, for instance, to factual 'background', or empirical analyses to dreamy speculation. This is the problem of multimodality - of multiple layers in a text where different layers can have different modes of representation. Without clear cues about the truth claims implied by different modes, the hypertext reader will carry across the hyperlinks all sorts of assumptions appropriate to one mode but not another. Hardt and Negri's *Empire* is already almost hypertextual in this sense: hard, closely evidenced analysis is supplanted in sudden jumps by reverie, poetic language and near hallucination. It is hard to know what to believe, what to take seriously, what merely to dream along with. We may not have seen many actual hypertexts yet that mix modes of representation so determinedly, but they are inevitable evolutionary descendants of the 'faction' that has crept into literary culture

in recent years. (This paper, indeed, has itself surreptitiously dramatised the problem of multimodality. How seriously do you take the 'hyper' leap into high theory? Orson Welles' *F For Fake* might come to mind...). This seems like more of a difficulty for factual hypertexts than hypertext fiction, but it isn't. Fictions make their own truth claims and the hypertextual licence for multimodality has the potential to shift the baseline for these claims, and the implied contract between reader and text, in just as disorientating a way within any 'one' fictional text.

Do we need, then, a code of practice for hyperlinking's handling of multimodality and the consequent variations in the nature of truth claims? Of course not. But does the cut & paste aesthetic in which hypertext often participates perhaps need a greater sense of historical propriety, of the need to understand the historical situation from which every fragment to be cut out and reconnected derives much of its meaning? It could be argued that these are then still available for manipulation, for reconstruction, but as grounded fragments still attached, if now less tightly, to the original situations that produced them. Only in this way, the argument would go, can hypertext become a reconstructive medium, a remediation of previous ways of handling truth claims, rather than a fantasy of liberation from the one true way. This *would be* more of a prescription for factual hypertexts than for hypertext fiction. But, anyway, it's wrong.

Let's assume for a moment, none the less, that it's not wrong. How would this paper end then? Perhaps like this. If what I was observing in the body language of my student hypertext readers were the signs of e-motion in action, we can now suggest a triadic structure for e-motion, instead of just the pairing of hyperlink activation (e.g. by clicking a mouse) with receptive disposition (e.g. expecting, querying, advancing, focusing, sympathising, etc. with all their specific variations). We can add to this pairing the propriety of the hyperlink itself, whether written that way (in the 'strong authoring' model of hypertext) or programmed into a more dynamic and adaptive system. By propriety, in a weak sense, is meant a respecting of both the linked materials (the connection to be activated) and the reader's likely receptive dispositions at that point. What I often saw in my students' frustrated reactions was not just unfamiliarity with hypertext per se, but a lack of respect by the hypertext in one or both of these ways,

thereby undermining trust and confidence and even engaging that larger panic about the digital's betrayal of the real that we see in the story of the shifted pyramid or Kate Winslet's legs. But there is a stronger sense of propriety, and it has been this paper's main intent to evoke it: that the hyperlink as an e-motional act should recognise where it can its own status as a modest transcoding of multitude's emergent way of acting in, and expectations of, the world. Turning this into practical suggestions for the writer of hypertext is not easy; but it will entail constructing the hyperlink in such a way that, on one hand, the reader's likely receptive dispositions at that point and, on the other, the potential connections between available textual nodes, both resonate with a particular enjoyment. It will be the enjoyment of connections that resist 'an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity' [27]. Otherwise, what's the point?

It is a pity that this conclusion is wrong. It has a satisfying cadence as rhetoric and a sense of final significance as argument. But the theoretical insights on which it depends in fact have no consequences whatsoever for practice, certainly not for the practice of hypertext writing. It is the equivalent of the claim too far in *F For Fake*. Rather, this paper has proposed a way of understanding the hyperlink's emergence as a cultural phenomenon that transcodes multitude, not a way of writing hypertexts in order to achieve that transcoding deliberately. The former has simply happened to us, at this cultural moment; the latter is an impossibility.

But what we can do is rid ourselves of the impulse that tempted us into that phony conclusion in the first place. It is precisely the same impulse that kept my student hypertext readers frustrated, for the most part, and that keeps me returning to the comforts of my old Infocom pseudo-hypertexts on my PDA. It is nothing less than the impulse, consistently damned by Richard Rorty and other neo-pragmatists, to believe that we are mirroring how things are. In short, the problem of representation really is *the* problem. The version of it encountered here is the belief that a better story, including (or perhaps especially) a better hypertext story, will be a closer approximation to the story that is out there, waiting to be represented – the 'solution' to the puzzle of hypertext form. Thus we turn to hypertext stories in the belief that the stories out there are really hypertextual, that our old one-dimensional stories were

inadequate to the hypertextual nature of reality. Wrong again, of course. These are all just tools. And tools, at key moments, offer some of the most powerful transcodings, not of something real out there to be represented, but of something real that we can make.

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