From Lexias to Remediation:

Theories of Hypertext Authorship in the 1990s

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Abstract

The effects that electronic-writing technologies will have on authorship remains an important issue in hypertext theory. Theorists agree that the author's function has changed and will continue to change as writing migrates from the page to the screen, but they disagree on the specifics of how print-based and hypertext-based authorship differ and whether this migration from the page to the screen constitutes a radical break from the age of print. Early hypertext advocates, writing in the early 1990s, claimed that electronic features, such as hypertextual links, transfer a large degree of textual control from writers to readers, thus blurring the distinction between the role of the author and that of the reader. More recently, theorists began to dispute the idea that the hypertextual reading experience was necessarily more creatively empowering than reading a printed book. Exploring the arguments of influential hypertext theorists, this essay traces the development of hypertext theory in the United States during the 1990s. It describes how poststructuralism has informed hypertext theories of authorship, identifies problematic or undertheorized claims made about hypertext, and points towards new avenues of theoretical inquiry that hypertext scholars are beginning to explore. It endorses the recent medial turn in hypertext theory and argues that literary scholars must revise existing theories of authorship to better articulate how hypertexts are produced and function within online networks where the written word coexists with streaming multimedia content.

Ted Nelson is credited with inventing the term *hypertext* in 1963, when he used it to refer to nonsequential writing assembled as "a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (Landow 4). However, it was not until the mid-1980s that the first functional hypertext systems were actually built; and although Tim Berners-Lee first proposed a standardized Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) in 1990, it took nearly a decade for his World Wide Web (WWW) to became a truly familiar mass medium. Even today, when scholars routinely correspond via e-mail and post course documents and syllabi on department websites, hypertext curiously remains a peripheral concern in many English departments—with the notable exception of Brown, UCLA, UC Santa Barbara, and a few other programs. Because hypertext is "a form of electronic text, a radically new information technology, and a mode of publication," (Landow 4) it is not altogether surprising that computer science, journalism, communications, and art-and-design departments have embraced hypertext and electronic publishing as part of their curricula more quickly than have English departments and the humanities in general. After all, the aforementioned departments frequently already possess the computer labs and software needed to teach students to author hypertexts. Thus, even though WYSIWYG ("what you see is what you get") HTML-authoring programs now make drafting a hypertext document about as easy as using word-processing software (most of which now include a fairly reliable"save as web page" feature that won't scramble your meticulously ordered footnotes) too many English department denizens, still regard hypertext as a *tekhnë*—an art, craft, or skill—better left to academics working in the arts or the sciences. Of course there are exceptions, and the UCLA English Department's support for the Electronic Literature Organizatinon should do much to legitimize hypertext studies in the academy, but this technophobic line of thinking about hypertext still appears to be the conventional wisdom for many working in the humanities. However, the commonsense assumptions upon which conventional wisdom is frequently based do not always withstand critical interrogation. Therefore, intent upon convincing skeptics that language departments need to train scholars to analyze and produce electronic writing and literature, I turn here to theory to bridge the gap between hypertext and the humanities—though I am not the first to do so. The history of literary theory in the nineties turns out to be intimately linked to the evolution of thought about hypertext during the same period.

Of Links and Lexias

That critical theory can inform our understanding of hypertext is an idea frequently attributed to George Landow, a professor of English and art history at Brown University. Landow's pioneering book, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*—first published in print and electronically 1992 and updated as *Hypertext 2.0* in 1997, applies key rhetorical terms used by structuralist and poststructuralist theorists such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida to hypertext studies. In *Hypertext* Landow argues that these French theorists and Mikhail Bakhtin use terms such as *link*, *web*, *network*, *interweaving*, *path*, *matrix*, and *interconnectedness* to articulate a theoretical vision of the decentered text existing in a non-hierarchical system of relations that anticipates how hypertextual systems operate (4, 23–5). Landow encourages readers to understand hypertext as a material actualization of these theorists' conceptual models, remarking that "hypertext creates an almost embarrassingly literal embodiment" of Derridean de-centering and Barthes's celebration of writerly over readerly texts (33–4). Electronic links decenter the hypertext by connecting readers to signifying material technically "outside" the hypertext's file structure, thereby blurring the boundaries between one text and another. Links also empower readers to make navigational choices and to fill in the gaps between lexias. In this way, Landow suggests, hypertexts require readers to actively participate in the playful production of textual meaning, a creative process that Barthes identified with writerly texts and "the death of the author." This latter phrase, often misunderstood, refers to Barthes's claim that we must abandon the notion that the author is the originator and final arbiter of a text's meaning.

Landow avoids Barthes's moribund rhetoric, but adheres to the idea that the author's textual authority is diminishing. I won't challenge this claim.[1] However, I do dispute the way in which Landow endows the link with an inherent power to make a hypertext more writerly. My experience reading submissions to the Electronic Literature Organization's 2001 hypertext fiction contest—an encouraging number of which were compelling, and many of which were dreadfully dull—confirmed for me that the element which most determines a hypertext's literary merit (here, the degree to which it can be dubbed "writerly") is the text's rhetoric, not the technical features. While links are, by definition, an essential component of a hypertext, critics must analyze how specific types of links operate rhetorically and poetically within hypertexts (see Parker) rather than simply assuming that all links empower readers in a Barthesian fashion. My disagreement with Landow, then, is over the extent to which he attributes agency to the hypertext links, which is a form of technological determinism. My critique, I should note, has theoretical antecedents.

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[1] In critical circles, the author's textual authority has been in decline at least since the New Critics advocated against the "intentional fallacy" of appealing to the author's intentions when interpreting a literary text. While in popular or commercial book culture, it would seem that Oprah Winfrey reigns as the most influential authority on contemporary literature.

Although Barthes's term, *lexia*, has been widely adopted to refer to the elemental text chunks in hypertexts, theorists soon began expressing reservations about Landow's vision of hypertext as the literal embodiment of poststructuralist textual theories. In 1994, Richard Grusin analyzed the writing of early hypertext theorists—including George Landow, Richard Lanham, Mark Poster, and Jay Bolter—and noted that their rhetoric frequently described the impact of electronic writing technologies via "trope[s] of dematerialization" (481). In an influential essay, "What is an Electronic Author? Theory and the Technological Fallacy," Grusin argues that when making claims about how electronic writing decontexualizes language, the aforementioned theorists tended to ascribe too much agency to computer technologies. Hypertext doesn't decontextualize language, Grusin suggests, for to suggest that digitally reproducing texts from different historical periods somehow decontextualizes or dehistoricizes them is to fetishize both the medium and the historical moment in which the texts were first produced. Rather, hypertext *re*contextualizes texts, making it possible for language to circulate in new and different environments. To counter what he rightly perceives as technological determinism, Grusin calls for a hypertext theory that pays greater attention to the "cultural work performed by electronic writing" by providing "thick historical or ethnographic descriptions" of the ways hypertext serves various social, political and economic functions in an age of information capitalism (483). In short, Grusin promoted a neo-Foucauldian or new historicist approach to hypertext, with the emphasis shifting from a deconstructionist focus on the dematerialized electronic signifiers to the manner in which electronic authoring technologies are deployed within socio-political institutions and discursive networks. Grusin writes, “to understand what is new and different about electronic authorship, we need to look at the way in which the network of inscriptions that constitute electronic writing circulates within a heterogeneous social space of cultural, linguistic, and technoscientific practices” (483).

In the remainder of this essay, then, I have two main objectives: to continue critiquing and refining theories of hypertext authorship and to examine how theorists, including Poster and Bolter, responded to Grusin’s call for thick descriptions of hypertext practices. Like Landow, Grusin approached hypertext from a poststructuralist framework, though his concern with the materiality of electronic technologies led him to endorse Foucauldian-influenced, genealogical studies of new media over a Derridean model stressing the instability and iterability of dematerialized electronic texts. Grusin’s influence on hypertext theory can be seen in *Remediation*, the book on new media technologies he co-authored with Bolter, and in Poster’s recent book, *What’s the Matter with the Internet?* However, when we analyze the way these theorists apply Foucault in their scholarship, it becomes apparent that a fully Foucauldian genealogy of hypertext has yet to be written. Before explaining why this is the case, let me return to Landow’s theory of the reconfigured author in *Hypertext*, for it is here, in the sections on hypertext authorship, that Foucault’s influence—as opposed to those of Derrida or Barthes—looms largest in this seminal study.

Reconfiguring the Author

Writing in the early 1990s, before the spread of the Internet, Landow argued that hypertext reconfigures the author in three primary ways, all of which are related and have antecedents in poststructuralist theories of the fragmented subject. The subject, according to this strain of poststructuralist theory, is said to be a product of language or discourse, to have no fixed identity, and to be in a perpetual process of becoming. For our purposes, I will accept this general theory of the fragmented subject as an accurate description of the postmodern self, which—largely due to the proliferation of networked communications technologies—finds itself interpellated, and thus placed in various subject positions, by an ever increasing number of media.[2] However, I do want to interrogate Landow's spin on this theory as it pertains to hypertext authorship. In my judgment, Landow is correct to posit that hypertext is "rewriting" the conditions of authorship, but he errs in declaring that hypertext is merging the roles of the reader and the writer. This claim is speculative at best, but before challenging it, I want to acknowledge Landow's contributions to theories of hypertext authorship.

First, Landow accurately claims that hypertext writing technologies configure the "author of a text *as a text*," a node within a distributed electronic network (72). Landow derives this idea from passages in Barthes's *S/Z*, Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, and Foucault's essay "What is an Author?" The latter text, from which Landow quotes at some length, most influenced Landow's theory of hypertext authorship. Of hypertext, Landow suggests that "the unboundedness of the new textuality disperses the author" in much the same way that Foucault challenges our ability to establish the fixed boundaries of an author's oeuvre (74). One way Foucault poses this challenge is by asking the methodological question of whether or not an anthology of Nietzsche's complete works should include marginalia—"a reference, a reminder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill"—written alongside the aphorisms in his notebooks (118). By raising such questions, Foucault tries to make us aware that post-romantic critics have tended to endow individual authors with too much importance in the meaning making process. Foucault's subversive questions and the concept of the *author-function* are designed to historicize the concept of authorship and to demonstrate that the term "author" does more than simply describe a writer's role in creating a text. Author is a title that designates a certain social function, and readers apply it to a writer only when a text achieves a certain amount of fame or notoriety. For Foucault, the text, or rather the text's reception within "legal and institutional systems," becomes the primary topic of interest to scholars concerned with authorship (130). And thus, from a Foucauldian perspective, it makes sense to speak of a text's author as a text, for it is in the realm of discourse that an author's proper name comes to signify a body of written work.

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[2] Although I am largely convinced by claims that our selves are fragmented, I also believe that most people do not regard our postmodern condition to be as potentially liberating as do some poststructuralist thinkers. Much of the angst in contemporary life can be traced to people's efforts to maintain a centered, unified self in spite of the pressures working to erode that self.

The publishing history of *The Unknown*—a web-based hypertext novel written by four obscure electronic writers working from different locales across the United States—illustrates brilliantly why Landow might link the theory of the text's author *as* text with hypertext. This sprawling, comic hypertext both parodies and demonstrates the contemporary author's conflicting attitudes towards fame, stardom, and the profit-driven publishing industry. In *The Unknown*, the hypertext's authors portray themselves as famous writers on a conspiratorial, gonzo book tour who frequently whoop it up with postmodern literary figures such as William Gaddis and Robert Coover. When Coover selected *The Unknown* as the co-winner of the 1998 trAce/Alt-X Hypertext Award and celebrated with the hitherto unknown writers at Brown University, the distinction between the textual and the real authors was blurred. *The Unknown*'s fictional characters were, in a sense, responsible for transforming the living hypertext writers into recognized authors by textualizing, and thus promoting, their literary identities on the Net. Such a conflation of *The Unknown*'s authors's textual and real selves is further complicated by the author's collaborative composition techniques and the fact that many of the hypertext's lexias are parasitic rewritings of pre-existing texts—alumni Christmas letters, newspaper profiles, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, etc.—written by others. Hypertext provided *The Unknown* authors an ideal medium in which to practice the sort of pirate or cut-up writing techniques developed by postmodern novelists such as Kathy Acker and William S. Burroughs. Such transgressive writing strategies, which deliberately come close to plagiarism, exemplify Landow's second claim about authorship—that hypertext de-centers the author's illusory unified self by foregrounding the extent to which text-based knowledge can never be grounded in a single individual.

Landow's third theoretical claim, that hypertext converges the reader and the writer's roles and thereby diminishes the autonomy of both the text and its author, cannot be illustrated so easily with existing hypertextual practices and is more problematic. When Landow suggests that in hypertext "the functions of the reader and writer become more deeply entwined with each other than ever before," (71) he seems to echo Walter Benjamin’s suggestion that “the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character” (232). Benjamin’s remark, made in 1936, referred to the “extension of the press” and the increase in the number of publication venues, such as editorial pages, made possible by mechanical-reproduction technologies (232). And while a similar argument could be made about the Internet and digital-reproduction technologies, Landow does not discuss electronic bulletin boards, chat rooms or other forums where readers can post their writing online. Instead, he suggests that “[o]ne clear sign of such transference of authorial power appears in the reader’s abilities to choose his or her way through a metatext, to annotate texts written by others, and to create links between documents written by others” (71). But is this power transfer really so clear? A careful look at the materiality of existing hypertext technologies, their design and operation, suggests that this transference of authorial power over the text to the reader has not yet occurred.

Landow’s convergence model exaggerates the extent to which hypertext transfers authorial control to the reader. While the ability to follow multiple pathways in a hypertext may seem novel and empowering, readers have always had the freedom to read printed texts in a non-linear fashion. Indeed, some books, such as the *I Ching*, must be read this way. Joseph Tabbi, the founding editor of the online journal *ebr* (electronicbookreview.com) suggests that our critical reading practices have always been hypertextual, and that “one can claim a superior value for hypertext as a medium of associative connection only by ignoring the actual language in which a text is written (and the more literary the work, the more associative and nonlinear will be its text, generally speaking)” (142).

Landow’s convergence theory also imagines authorial control being transferred to readers through the practice of electronic annotation, that is, adding new text to a document, or linking between documents. While early hypertext proponents emphasized reader-annotation features, they have not been realized in hypertext software programs and are “comparatively rare on the Web” (Kirschenbaum 131). Although Mosaic, an early Web browser, did offer an annotation feature, it’s commercial descendent, Netscape Navigator, dropped it. Matthew Kirschenbaum, evincing a Foucauldian awareness of institutional power/knowledge dynamics, suggests that “this example illustrates…the way in which we use and understand hypertext is shaped not by the inherent limitations of the medium, but rather by software engineering and product design. Consequently, hypertext should always be thought of as part of the broader social contexts in which information technology operates" (131). Thus, readers of a web-based hypertext cannot add links to it unless they know the encrypted File Transfer Protocol (FTP) password to access the server on which the hypertext's data files are stored. And commercial and legal restrictions may limit a hypertext author's freedom to link to another site from their webpage. So, at present, Landow's vision of hypertext readers becoming writers remains largely unrealized, not due to technological limitations, but rather social and legal constraints.

Authors Analogue and Digital

When speculating about how hypertext as a publishing medium might affect authorship it is useful to recall the conditions in which the print-based author emerged as a cultural force, because important parallels can be made between the status of the analogue author in early book culture and the status of the digital author in early Internet culture. This is Mark Poster's basic argument in "Authors Analogue and Digital, where he suggests that "[w]hen today we question the truth value of words or images on the Internet, we are simply in the same position as readers of books were in the seventeenth century" (89). Here, Poster draws heavily upon Adrian Johns' study *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*. According to Johns, the authority that books and their authors possess in modern cultures cannot be taken for granted. Succumbing to technological determinism, historians have overemphasized the printing press's role in fixing the meaning of books and establishing the authority of authors. While the printing press made producing multiple copies of texts easier and altered the author's relationship with his readership (making it larger and more anonymous) it did not automatically instill "fixity" to written words. Nor did the mass-printed book and its author suddenly acquire the credibility or cultural capital they currently possess. In London, the world of the stationers, the loosely knit guild of printers and booksellers, was chaotic. Piracy, plagiarism, and misprints—some accidental, others intentional—were commonplace. Readers regarded printers, rather than writers, as the authority behind a book. Only after cultural norms—such as copyright laws and publication standards—emerged could writers and their books become widely accepted sources of veracity and knowledge. In short, the modern concept of the author was socially constructed over two centuries and, to borrow Foucault's term, the modern *author-function* was the product of complex political and institutional negotiations that varied according to time and locale.

The lesson that Poster would have us draw from the rise of the analogue author, his term for Foucault's author-function, is that although the digital author is in the process of supplanting the analogue author, it is still too soon to predict the functions that digital authors will serve in the future. The closest Poster comes to doing so is to suggest that the future will bring a "rearticulation of the author from the center of the text to its margins, from the source of meaning to an offering, a point in a sequence of continuously transformed matrix of signification" (91). If this depiction of digital authorship seems vague, that's because Poster is unable and unwilling to speculate about the shape of future telecommunications technologies. The most he will commit to is observing that "If there is one rule may obtain to the introduction of new technologies, it is not determinism but unpredictability" (91).

One trend in authorship that is likely to continue is the decline in the individual author's status within the domain of cultural production. The rise of the popular-culture industries (tabloid journalism, cinema, etc.) at the end of the nineteenth century marked the beginning of the author's decline in legal status and cultural import. This decline only accelerated with the spread of broadcast media such as radio and television. "With the broadcasting model of cultural reproduction, brand names, logos, images, and trademarks displace the author from the center of the cultural object and the focus of the copyright" (Poster 90). Today, hypertext and digital publication technologies raise difficult questions about "the relation of an author's creativity to a work" (Poster 93). Poster doesn't provide any details of actual legal controversies over digital authorship and copyright, though future genealogists will need to scour the legal archives containing court transcripts of present-day digital copyright debates in order to piece together accurate "new historicist" accounts of the author-function's evolution. That said, it's clear that the recent Napster controversy about whether online “file-sharing” of MP3 music files constitutes copyright infringement has demonstrated the law’s inability to regulate and contain unauthorized uses of technology. Lawmakers, like us scholars, are always playing catch-up when it comes to theorizing technological practices. Therefore, I stress the speculative nature of my following hypotheses.

When electronic texts eventually become as commonplace, and as profitable, as printed books, digital copies will be bootlegged and distributed over the Internet with file-sharing software in much the same way that digital audio files already circulate widely today. Rather than increasing production costs in order to purchase the latest encryption technologies to protect their copyrights, many authors will choose to publish their hypertexts online—at literary web archives, libraries and gallery spaces—where they will be available to readers for a low cost or for free. Hypertext authors who earn critical acclaim will need to subsidize their writing the way most poets do today, by working odd jobs and securing institutional support from universities and foundations. Although contemporary writers generally can’t expect to make a living reading their texts the way musicians can support themselves by playing their music live, it is possible that some future hypertext authors will supplement their publishing incomes with literary performances.[3]

Remediation: A Genealogical Theory of New Media

In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin provide a genealogy of media affiliations intended to subvert modernist, progressive models of media evolution. Bolter and Grusin adopt the term “remediation” to describe the process by which a new medium refashions or repurposes already existing media. They describe their project as a genealogy because, following Foucault, they want to undermine a linear view of media history by stressing the ruptures, discontinuities and contingencies in the evolutionary process. A key idea, then, is that "older media can also remediate newer ones," such as when the Cable News Network (CNN) modified the format of their news graphics so viewers's TV screens would appear more like a website (55). Bolter and Grusin aim to provide a general theory capable of articulating how new digital media, such as virtual reality systems and the WWW, come to acquire legitimate cultural functions within already existing social and cultural networks. They argue that two styles, or logics, of mediation dominate the digital media of our historical present—the logic of "transparent immediacy" and the logic of "hypermediacy." The design logic of transparent immediacy strives to disguise or erase all traces of mediation in their creations, thereby producing technological artifacts that seem to offer users a natural, or unmediated, experience with the medium's contents. The design logic of hypermediacy responds to Western culture's fascination with technology by deliberately foregrounding the medium as a medium for the user, who is encouraged to "delight in that acknowledgement" (42–3).

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[3] The outlines of such practices are already visible. For example, the authors of *The Unknown* host boisterous live readings, some of which are archived in their hypertext, in which they project their hypertext on a screen and invite audience members to shout out the links that they want to follow. Such readings are most successful in bars, bookstores, and other intimate venues where the ratio between audience and performer remains small. When the size of the audience gets too big, the spontaneous interactions become too noisy and chaotic. The multimedia productions of spoken-word artists, such as Spalding Gray, or performance artists, such as Laurie Anderson, provide better clues, perhaps, at how hypertext authors might stage their works before sizable audiences.

Although the two strategies, transparent immediacy and hypermediacy, seem to obey conflicting impulses, they are actually dependent on one another according to a "double logic of remediation" (53). Bolter and Grusin write: "Hypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real. They are not striving for the real in any metaphysical sense. Instead, the real is defined in terms of the viewer's experience; it is that which would evoke an immediate (and therefore authentic) emotional response" (53). They proceed to identify three principles of remediation's double logic: that remediation is the mediation of mediation, that mediation is inseparable from reality (for mediations are a type of artifact), and the goal of remediation is to reform or improve upon another medium. In a footnote they suggest that this logic is Derridean. But in what sense? What Bolter and Grusin borrow from Derrida is a deconstructive model of referentiality that denies the possibility of experiencing a pure, originary presence. Derrida's theory of *écriture* conceptualizes writing not as the re-presentation of spoken words originating in a human consciousness, but rather as a general field in which signifiers acquire meaning via their relationships with other signifiers within a system of *différances* (of deferral and divergence). Derrida conceives of writing as a sort of virtual reality, a textual network of relations between traces, the significance of which never remains fixed for long. Bolter and Grusin draw a parallel between our thoroughly mass-mediated environs and Derrida's textualized space. Both are virtual spaces in which we are immersed and where we interface with reality and thus come to make sense of the world and, perhaps, experience *jouissance*. The theoretical work that remains to be done, but, of course, can never be truly finished, is assigning meanings and values to the signifying events—the inscriptions—that occur and are repeated within these thoroughly intertextual and intermedial environments.

Conclusion: The Medial Turn

Earlier, I noted that Grusin called for a neo-Foucauldian turn in new media studies, yet I've just described how his and Bolter's theory of remediation draws upon Derridean theories of intertextuality. This requires some explaining. We have yet to see a fully Foucauldian genealogy of hypertext, primarily because scholars currently lack the historical distance needed to gain access to and analyze many relevant archival materials.[4] Of course, just how soon, if ever, such archival material will be readily available for scholarly analysis remains difficult to predict.

Let me conclude, then, by summarizing how the application of poststructuralism in hypertext theory evolved in the nineties. When the majority of hypertexts existed on floppy disks, theorists like Landow placed a deconstructive emphasis on language, and the dematerialized nature of the electronic marks. As the WWW grew, theorists like Grusin recognized the need to address the role of hypertext in the emergent network culture. Thus, they shifted their attention from language to discourse, or, more accurately, discursive networks. While the Internet remains a primarily text-based medium, expanded bandwidth capabilities are making it possible for ever larger multimedia files—images, sound, and video— to be transmitted with greater ease. At the same time, the price of multimedia production technologies continues to drop, which allows individuals to begin authoring and publishing high-quality digital texts. As digital media converge, the content on the Net is becoming more like a hybrid of the telephone and television. In an attempt to keep up with these changes, theorists are shifting their focus from discourse to media, and how the material constraints of a specific medium shapes its signifying potential. However, while doing so, they retain a deconstructionist theory of meaning and representation, which regards significance as a product of the arbitrary and contingent relationship between signifiers (be they words, images, or media objects) rather than being inherent in the signifiers themselves. Thus, in *Remediation* we find Bolter and Grusin acknowledge their indebtedness to poststructuralism on one page and critique it on the next: “Postmodern theory errs in trying to isolate language as a cultural force, for it fails to appreciate how language interacts with other media, other technologies, and other cultural artifacts” (57).

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[4] Scholars may want to examine, for example, the publishing contracts between Eastgate, one of the first hypertext publishers, and pioneering hypertext authors, such as Michael Joyce and Shelley Jackson, and assess how effectively their hypertexts were marketed and distributed; or they might study the evolutionary design of Eastgate's Storyspace software, one of the first hypertext-authoring programs, to determine how its features enhanced and constrained the first generation of computerized hypertexts.

Given this medial turn in hypertext theory, scholars woriking in English and other language-based studies are in a position to see that literary texts—from oral folktales to chapbooks to novels to critical manifestos—are among the media being remediated on the Internet and in other hypertextual environments. However, to do so we will need to expand our definitions of literacy to include a broader array of signifying practices. Contemporary theories of hypertext authorship must strive to account for the relationships between written words and the non-linguistic objects—that is, the graphic icons and images, the audio-visual files, and the interactive programming features—that are integrated into the electronic metatext. Hypertext theories of authorship will necessarily stress the importance of authorial collaboration in the creative process of designing and building hypertexts. Hypertext authorship entails, of course, writing, but it also involves an array of aesthetic, digital-production techniques such as image manipulation, animation, audio editing, and coding. A successfully authored literary hypertext will feature an interface that remediates other media forms in such a way that responding to language remains an essential part of the user’s affective reading experience.

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